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The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction

JUNE

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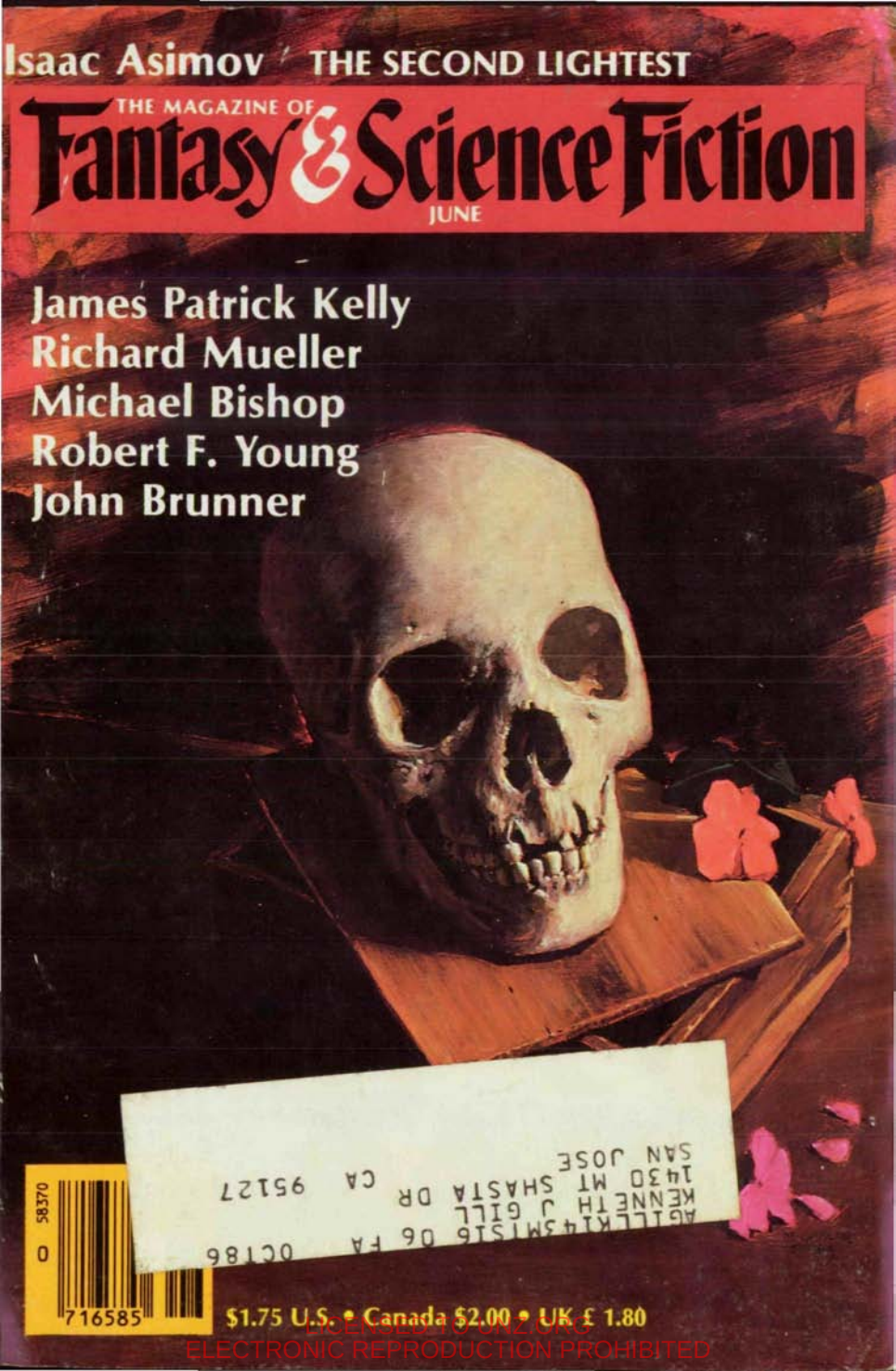

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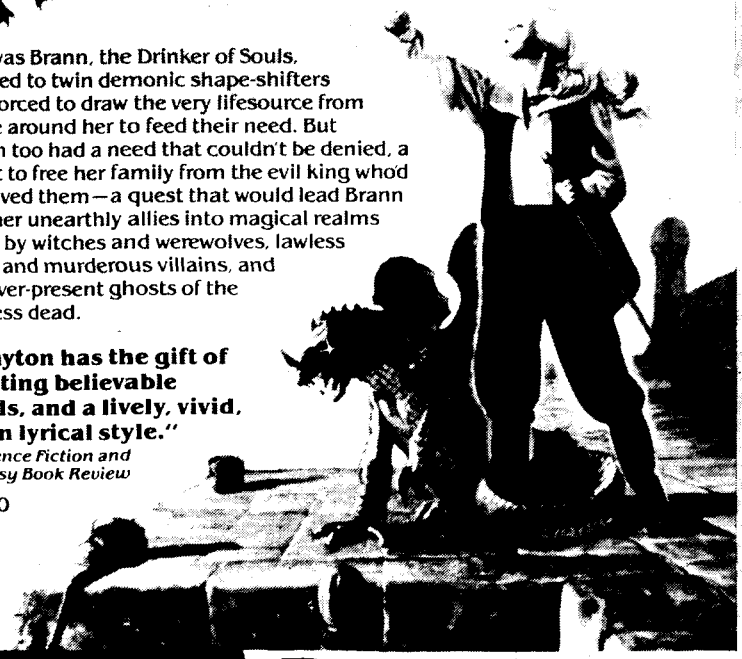

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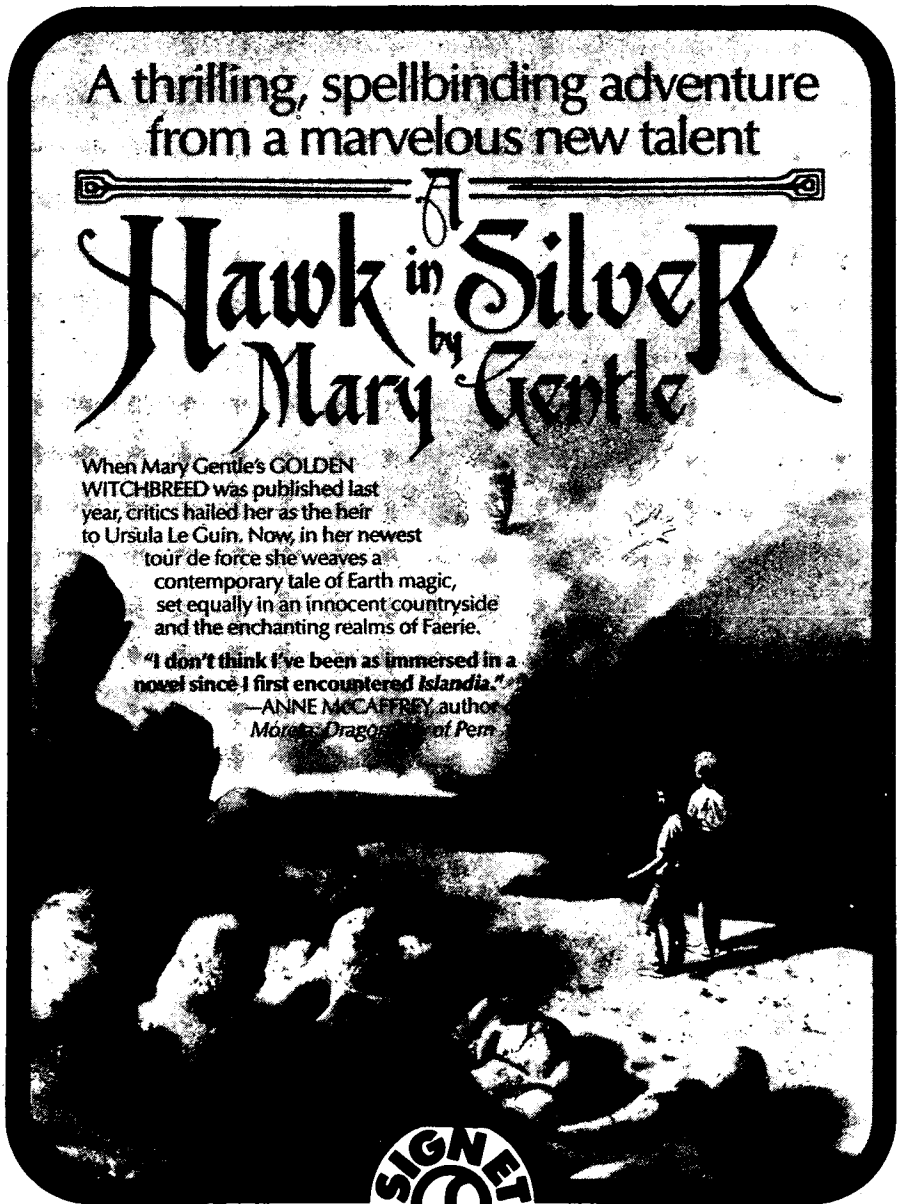

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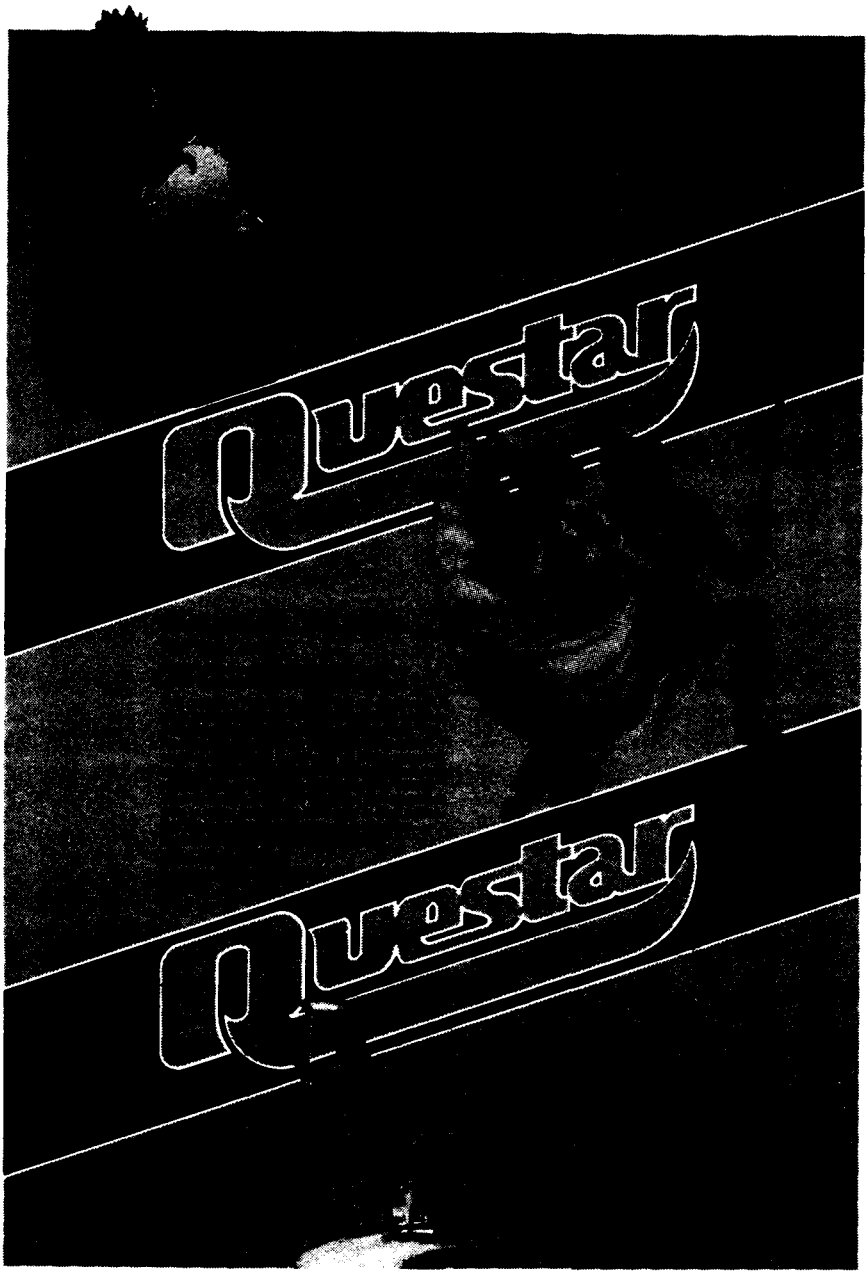

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Robert F. Young's new story is full of eerie and compelling images; it concerns a time traveler who voyages to the aftermath of the Battle of Armageddon and makes a chilling discovery...

Revolution 20

BY
ROBERT F. YOUNG

After stepping out of my time machine (the Time Traveler said), I dragged it into a nearby copse and camouflaged it with branches that I cut from the trees. I knew it would not be long before the leaves on the branches died and fell to the ground, revealing the machine's presence, but this posed no problem, for I did not plan to remain in the future for more than a day.

I had no idea what year I had emerged in, but I knew from the instructions with which I had programmed the machine that spatially, at least with respect to Earth, I had not moved an inch.

I did not believe, however, despite the fact that my house had disappeared from around me and despite the presence of a copse where none had existed before, that my leap through time exceeded half a century, until, emerging from the trees and looking down upon the plain that spread out below and far beyond the hill on which my house had stood, I saw that the vast expanse of cultivated fields that had greeted my eyes "that morning" when I looked out my bedroom window had become a necropolis.

The graves spread out both to right and left as far as my gaze would go, and extended into the distance before me till at last a city, which stood where no city had stood before, barred their way. Most of them were marked by horizontal gravestones set flush with the ground, but there were occasional old-fashioned tombstones, too. As for the city, it bore a strong resemblance to most cities when viewed from afar, except that it was surrounded by a wall. Its presence lent a reassuring note to

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the macabre scene, and, deciding to pay it a visit, I descended the hill.

I took nothing with me, other than the contents of my pockets. Indeed, there was nothing I could have taken, for I had brought nothing with me. As I said, I did not plan to remain in the future for more than a day. (I had packed a lunch, but in my haste to get started I had forgotten it.)

Possibly, if there had been no city to beckon me, nor a cemetery to arouse my curiosity, I would have gotten back into my time machine after a brief look around and have returned without further ado to the age where I belong.

Later on, I wished I had.

The position of the sun — it was almost directly above my head — told me it was midday. A warm wind breathing over the land emphasized a fact of which the leaves of the trees and greenness of the grass had already apprised me — that the month was June or July. I congratulated myself on my good fortune, for I might have emerged in the middle of winter. My time machine, you must remember, is but a primitive affair, and while I can program it with respect to space, the time stream remains an unknown river — a river I had set sail upon in much the same manner the ancient Phoenicians had set sail upon the sea.

Indeed, I was not wholly certain I could find my way back to port.

No fence barred my way into the necropolis. The graves simply began where the wild grass left off. They had been arranged in straight lines to and from the city, and were quite close together, but the aisles between them were wide enough to enable me to walk without desecrating any of them with my footsteps. The grass growing upon and between them had been mowed, but not recently, and was in need of another cutting.

The markers were not new; neither were they old. This led me to the conclusion that the dead had been buried over but a brief period of time.

But how could so many people have died almost all at once in just *one* city? And what of all the other cities? There must be hundreds of them. Thousands. Did they, too, have necropolises on their laps?

A plague? A proton storm? No, in all probability a war. But certainly not a nuclear war, for the city still stood intact. Unless cobalt bombs had been used.

But if so, no one would have been left to bury the dead.

I leaned over one of the horizontal gravestones to read the inscription. But the stone's face was blank. I looked at a dozen others, with the same result. I looked at the face of one of the old-fashioned tombstones. It, too, was blank.

I did not look further, for it was clear that none of the markers bore names.

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Surely, then, there must have been a war — a war that had left so many dead that the task of burying all the bodies had been so herculean it had been impossible to identify each one.

Confronted with so many dead bodies, many peoples in the past would simply have buried them in mass graves. This had, in fact, been done innumerable times. Respect for the inhabitants of this future age rose up in me, and it was with added reassurance that I continued on my way to the city.

It was much farther away than I had thought. My pocket watch told me that almost an hour had gone by since I started out, yet it did not seem to be any closer. I thought of Kafka's Castle. But the analogy did not fit, for I found that the buildings were slightly clearer than they they had been, that the wall was more distinct. It was a high wall. As I walked, I wondered why a city that appeared to be modern in other respects should be surrounded by a wall.

But my wonder about the wall was soon superseded by the awe that grew in me with every step I took. It can be likened to that of a space traveler who knows before he leaves Earth that space is vast, but does not truly realize the extent of that vastness till he finds himself in the midst of it.

At this point a faint roar became audible in the distance. As it grew in volume, I was able to make out its source. At first I saw only a dark blur, far to my left, but as it came nearer I saw that it was some kind of a machine. I stopped in my tracks and stared at it. It was about twenty feet wide and six feet high, and there were big wheels on either side. It whined as well as roared, and at length I saw that there were whirling blades beneath it. I knew then that I was looking at a huge lawn mower — one that was bearing directly down upon me!

I began running out of its path, but in my haste I tripped over a gravestone that protruded slightly above the ground, and went sprawling on my face. I did not try to get to my feet; instead, I rolled the rest of the way out of the juggernaut's path. The wheels missed me by less than an inch, and the whirling blades sprayed me with particles of grass.

I got to my feet, intending to shake my fist at the driver, but there was no driver to be seen. I stared after the machine, upset over my narrow escape; if I had not gotten out of the way, the blades would have chewed me up like a twig.

A vertical tombstone lay in the machine's path. The machine moved all the way up to the tombstone, then mowed around it as closely as it could, after which the machine continued on its way, following the same straight line it had followed before.

Since the machine had shown no

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such consideration for me, I concluded that the computer that controlled it had been programmed only to recognize stone and was incognizant of human flesh. I waited till the machine was out of sight, then, after brushing off the particles of grass from my breeches and shirt and shaking them out of my hair, I resumed walking toward the city.

The grass beneath my feet was close-cropped now; the lawn mower was working its way outward from the city. Probably by the time it finished the job, the grass it had cut in the beginning would have grown so high it would have to go back and start over again.

A glance at the sun told me it was halfway down the blue slope of the afternoon sky. My throat by now was as dry as old shoe leather, and I cursed myself for not having had the foresight to have brought a canteen of water with me on my trip. I was hungry, too, and I upbraided myself for having forgotten my lunch.

I was tempted to turn back — not because of my hunger and my thirst, but because of the necropolis itself. The thought of the millions of people who lay dead beneath my feet oppressed me. More than that, it imbued me with a disturbing sense of unreality. How could I alone be alive upon this vast landscape?

But the city was alive, I told myself. I was close enough to it now to be able to make out the windows in its nearer buildings. They caught the rays of the sun and cast them back like stilettos into my retinas. I saw that the wall had windows, too, and knew then it was not a wall, but an apartment complex — one that had been built, no doubt, to keep pace with the growing population.

Probably it was empty now, for the survivors could not be many. Unless the war or the proton storm or the plague had occurred longer ago than I thought, giving them a chance to multiply.

As I grew closer, I began to *hear* the city. But it did not sound like any city I had ever heard before, for there were no traffic sounds, only the babble of many voices, some of them lifted in song. This, taken in conjunction with the fact that I had seen no roads, would seem to indicate that there was no traffic to hear. But the nonexistence of roads within my present purview did not mean that there were none, and the absence of traffic sounds could mean that in this day and age vehicles made no sound.

The roar the lawn mower had made, however, did not bear this out.

And then I heard another sound — a pleasant, nostalgic sound that came from but a short distance away. *Snip-snip. Snip-snip. Snip-snip.* I saw the girl then. She was kneeling beside a nearby tombstone, clipping the grass the mower had missed with a pair of grass shears. She saw me at the same

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time I saw her, and smiled and got to her feet and walked toward me.

She wore a brightly patterned dirndl dress that fell below her knees, and sandals. Her hair was long and black, her cheeks were rosy. Her nose, although slightly aquiline, did not in the least conflict with the fullness of her lips or diminish the warmth that had come into her deep, dark eyes.

Coming up to me, she said, "Welcome to our city."

Languages change radically over the years, and I had feared that English by this time would be far beyond my comprehension. Yet it had not changed at all. "Thank you," I said.

"I suspect you must be bewildered."

My eyes must have betrayed me. "I don't believe I've ever seen so many graves."

"Yes, they are legion. My name is Elizabeth."

"Keith." Since she had not added her surname, I did not bother to add mine.

I asked a question to which I had already guessed the answer: "Why is it that none of the graves are marked with the names of the dead?"

"There were so many bodies to bury that names were dispensed with. Come with me to the city, Keith — I'm all through work for the day. I'll update you on the way."

Could she somehow have surmised from my question and from the bewilderment in my eyes, I wondered, that I was a denizen of a different age? I found this difficult to believe. Nevertheless, it was clear she had guessed I was a stranger.

She chose one aisle between the graves, and I chose the next one to it, and we began walking toward the city. "Everything you need to know," she said across the graves, "was written down long ago in the Apocalypse, although all of it as yet has not come true. And Saint John the Divine erred with respect to the Battle of Armageddon. It wasn't fought between the forces of good and the forces of evil — it was fought between the living and the dead."

"Armageddon?"

"Yes. But it was more than a mere battle — it was a war."

"The — dead rose up?"

"Only those who had died during the millenium, which began in 1914 and ended in 2914. Most rose up in a single night twenty-some years ago."

"How *could* they have risen up?"

"Haven't you ever read the Revelation of Saint John the Divine?"

"Of course I have."

"Then you already know the answer. When it happened, naturally the living were appalled. 'There's no more room!' they cried. 'Go back to your graves!' But of course the dead would not, and it was then that the Battle of Armageddon took place." She made a sweeping gesture toward

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the graves. "The losers lie in peace."

As a man of science, I had always looked upon the Revelation of Saint John the Divine as the ravings of a madman. In my scientific opinion, Swinburne, when he wrote that "dead men rise up never," stated an unequivocal truth. So I did not, of course, believe what Elizabeth had said about the dead rising from their graves, although I had to admit that her gruesome tale served to explain the presence of the necropolis.

But now, if nothing else, I at least knew approximately how far into the future I had come — unless she had also lied about the date.

"The Common Council," she remarked, "is debating whether or not to remove the vertical tombstones and to replace them with the common stone plaques like those on the other graves. I think it would be a good idea." She held up her shears. "Then the mower *could* cut *all* the grass and eliminate the need for these. Since the dead are honestly arranged, it was absurd to use conspicuous markers on some of the graves in the first place."

Yes. Absurd. As absurd as the tale she had told me.

I began to see other people. They were engaged in the same task as that pursued by Elizabeth when I first saw her. There were a few children, too. They were playing in the aisles between the graves. Many of the adults were old, but all of them, young and old alike, had rosy cheeks. Some of them waved to me. I waved back. The diversity of their apparel intrigued me. It was as though a revolt in fashion, similar to the one that had occurred in the 1960's, had taken place.

My thirst by this time was next to unbearable, and I resolved to head for the nearest drinking fountain the moment we entered the city. But when at last we passed through a hiatus in the apartment complex into one of the city's streets, I saw no sign of one.

But I saw people. Hundreds of them. Thousands. They filled the street. They stood in doorways. They leaned out of windows. No wonder, assuming for the moment that Elizabeth's tale was true, there had been no room for the dead!

The buildings were in a sad state of disrepair. Many of their windows were broken, and their facades brought to mind the faces of old men. None were nearly as towering as the twentieth-century buildings I was familiar with.

I now knew why I had not heard the sound of traffic. There was none to hear. This despite the fact that the street along which Elizabeth conducted me was wide enough to accommodate four lanes of cars.

I did not ask Elizabeth why there were none, or why there was no visible sign of transportation of any other kind. She had already told me enough lies.

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At this point an old man clad in slacks and shirt and sneakers walked up to me and stared into my face. I stared into his, shaken by a feeling of déjà vu. I could have sworn I had seen his face before, but for the life of me I could not remember where.

He stared at me only for a moment, then smiled and went on his way. I knew of course that he must be an utter stranger. But why the déjà vu, and why had he stared at me.?

At length Elizabeth led me sideways through the crowd to the wide doorway of one of the buildings. We stepped into a large, littered lobby. There were elevators — three of them, in fact — on the wall opposite the entrance, but apparently they did not work, for she began leading me up successive flights of stairs, wedging her way through the people who sat upon the steps. I followed her like a stray dog; I did not know what else to do.

"Since there are no rooms available anywhere in the city," she explained on one of the landings, "You will have to share mine."

It had been on the tip of my tongue to ask her if there was a restaurant in the building, but both her words and the matter-of-fact way she had spoken them put my unspoken ones to rout. I am not in the least Prufrockian, but I had always assumed that the sexual freedom rampant in my own time was a mere evolutionary phase, and that it would soon give way to a more civilized form of behavior. The discovery that it still existed almost a millenium in my future had caught me completely off guard.

I do not know how many flights of stairs we ascended; I can only say all of them, for her room proved to be on the topmost floor. She led me down a dusty corridor to its door. The corridor had a musty smell. So, for that matter, did the entire building. All of the rooms we passed seemed to be occupied; at least I heard voices coming from within. Her room proved to be just that. I, who had expected to see at least a makeshift apartment, stared at the room's mildewed walls, at the cobwebs hanging from its ceiling, at the three sad-looking pieces of furniture it contained: a straight-backed wooden chair, a battered vanity with a cracked mirror, and a broken-down bed with only a mattress to its name. A single window in the wall opposite the door provided a view of the late afternoon sky.

She stepped to one side so that I could precede her through the doorway. She did not follow me. Instead, she said, still standing in the corridor, "I'll leave you here for now, and go and inform the members of the council of your presence. Tonight some of them will come back with me and examine you."

"What in the world for?"

She smiled, revealing even rows of teeth so white they glowed, even in

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the gloom. "It has to be officially determined whether you are alive or dead."

I remembered that she had said *most* of the dead had risen up from their graves in a single night. Apparently, then, the process was still going on. Good Lord! — did she think there was a possibility that I had just risen from mine? Shaken, I said, "I thought you'd already made the determination."

"Yes." She smiled again. "And I'm certain I'm right. But the decision has to be made officially. So good-bye for now, Keith — I'll see you later," and before I could stop her, she closed the door and locked it behind her..

I walked partway across the dusty floor and sat down on the chair. I assured myself that even if her gruesome tale were true, I had nothing to fear, because I was alive.

I found myself staring at the bed. It did not look as though anyone had ever slept on it. The mattress was as mildewed as the walls and gave forth a moldly smell. Did she really sleep on the horrid thing?

I was tempted to go through the drawers of the vanity, but the rigid set of values I have always lived by prevented me from doing so.

Probably when the council members came, one of them would feel for my heartbeat by pressing his fingers against my carotid artery. Thank God I was alive!

I caught myself up. I was a sober, sane, and sensible man — and sober, sane, and sensible men do not believe in resurrection. They especially do not believe in it on a worldwide scale.

I had heard a tale told by a madwoman.

I drew the chair over to the window, which was open, and sat down again, placing my elbows on the sill. The window was on the east side of the building, but there was another street below. It, too, was filled with people. The building's shadows had brought on an early twilight, and the people were wandering up and down the street in the crepuscular light.

Why didn't any of them go home to dinner?

The thought of food did more than reawaken my appetite, it reminded me of my thirst. The moment Elizabeth came back with the council members, I would demand both food and water.

The buildings across the street were not nearly as tall as this one. Below me and across the way, I could see other people looking out the windows, or leaning through them and looking down into the street.

Didn't anyone have anything to do?

I raised my eyes. I found that I could see over the building tops to the rest of the plain, which the city had hidden from my view. I half ex-

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pected to see a second necropolis, or an extension of the first, but I did not. Instead, I saw a sea of tents.

There were thousands and thousands of them. They spread out seemingly to the horizon itself, and to left and to right to the limit of my gaze. In the nearer distance I could make out people moving among them.

For a long while I sat there staring at the darkening plain.

When at length I brought my gaze — and myself, too, for that matter — back to my immediate surroundings, I saw that darkness filled the street below and that the people were carrying torches. In the windows across the way, I saw the flickering of candlelight. I refused to believe that even a city as deteriorated as this one no longer had electricity, and I felt my way through the darkness of the room to the door and felt the wall on either side of the jambs in search of a switch. I did not find one.

I remembered then that I had not seen a single streetlight and that the room possessed neither a ceiling bulb nor a lamp. Electricity, then, must have been superseded by a more advanced and far subtler form of illumination. But what had happened to it?

The window, lighted by the torchlight from the street, formed a pale rectangle in the darkness. I returned to it and sat back down in the chair and looked down once more at the people in the street.

Sometimes some of them would look upward, and despite the intervening distance and with only torchlight to go by, I could see that something had gone wrong with their faces. I raised my eyes to the windows across the street. One of the people looking out of them must have sensed my gaze, for he looked up at me. His eyes were burning holes in his skull, and his face had fallen away.

A number of the people in the street began to sing. I recognized the tune. The words, which they sang with zestful abandon, dated from my childhood:

> Did you ever think when the hearse went by
> That someday you are going to die?
> . . .
> They'll wrap you up in a woolen sheet,
> And cover you over from head to feet.

Freed at last from my misconception, I smelled their rotted flesh.

I heard footsteps in the hall.

No doubt you are wondering (said the Time Traveler), if you have thus far believed a word I have said, how I conceivably could have walked with my eyes wide open into a city of the dead and not have known it. Or how, for that matter, I could have looked at Elizabeth and not have known at once that she was not truly alive.

The answer is simple: By day, the

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dead *are* alive. It is only with the coming of night that their false flesh falls away.

The living did not rebury the dead, as I had thought. The dead buried the living. For how could the living have won the so-called Battle of Armageddon when the foes they sought to kill were in one sense already dead?

Why the meticulous burials? Why the dedicated maintenance of the necropolis — dedicated to a point where an electronic lawn mower represents the only machine they did not get rid of?

The answer to that is simple, too: Being dead, they revere the dead.

And, being dead, they hate the living.

The council members who stood outside the door would not try to find my heartbeat — far from it. Their examination would be purely visual. The moment they discovered I was not dead, they would take steps to see to it that I was.

When the door opened I saw four figures in the corridor. One of them was Elizabeth's. I knew because of the dirndl dress that hung upon her in tatters. She carried a candle. I looked away from her ghastly face

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and pushed my way through the other three bags of bones and ran down the stairs, forcing my way through the living corpses that sat upon the steps.

I fought my way through the walking dead to the edge of the city, breathing through my mouth to avoid the unspeakable stench. This time when I crossed the necropolis, I did not care in my haste whether or not I stepped upon the graves. You see me here before you, so you know that I made it back. Now you can return to your offices and write your tongue-in-cheek articles for your newspapers — or, if you like, transcribe my words from your tapes.

You might add, if you do not transcribe them, that I am going back. Oh yes. But not right away. This time I am going to make the journey in a different kind of time machine.

How do I know I am going back? The answer to that is simple, too: I saw myself in the city of the dead.

But there is no need for you to be envious of my resurrection, for sooner or later you will make the journey, too, and you also will rise from your graves. So good-bye for now, gentlemen. See you later.

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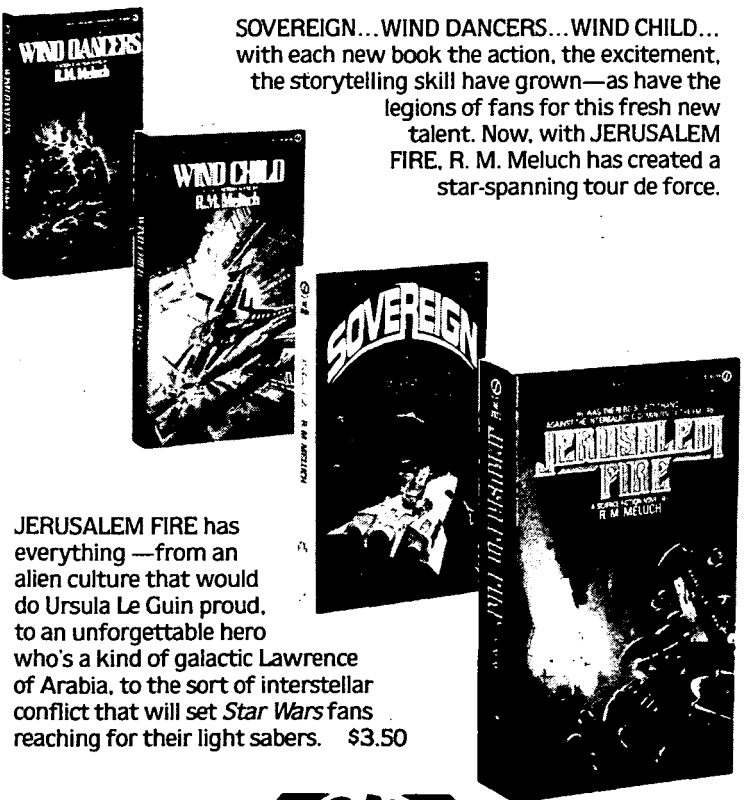

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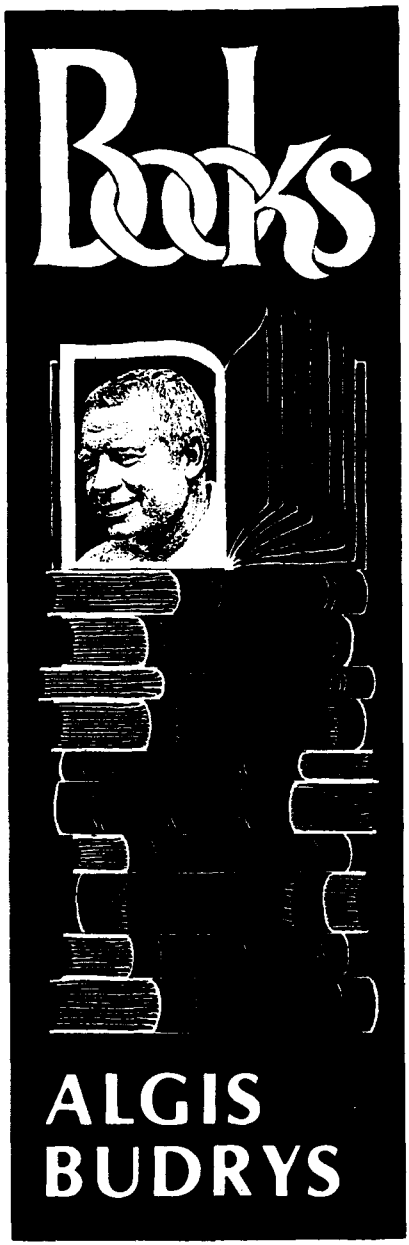

The Early Asimov, Book One, Isaac Asimov, Del Rey, $3.95

The Early Asimov, Book Two, Isaac Asimov, Del Rey, $3.95

Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories 14 (1952), Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg, eds., Daw, $3.50

The Alternate Asimovs, Isaac Asimov, Doubleday, $11.95

The first Asimov story I ever read was "Death Sentence," in the November, 1943, issue of *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine. It was the second issue of *Astounding* I'd come across in the back of a dingy and visibly strait-laced stationery and greeting card shop in Vineland, New Jersey, where I went to high school. And it was of course the second in what would be a string unbroken, month after month, for a quarter-century, thanks in large part to "Death Sentence." I will explain.

Up to then, I'd been a reader of *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures, Weird Tales, Thrilling Wonder Stories, Startling Stories, Captain Future, Astonishing Stories* — when I could find a copy — and *Planet.* These were fine stuff, with their attractive covers and their thoughtful ideas, although I did have to smuggle them into the house due to certain misapprehensions about them on my parents' part. Getting off the bus, I'd hide them under a large rock beside our chicken farm, and then slip out at night to retrieve them.

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I found the October, 1943, *Astounding* only because I was desperate for a fix. The brightly decorated street-corner kiosks were all out of new issues, and in desperation I had tunnelled through every conceivable indoor source, coming last to the obscure rack in the dingiest corner of the shop where two massive and surly maiden ladies sold copies of *Tropic of Cancer* from under the counter. I had in fact been hoping not for a magazine — I thought I knew all the magazines — but for some such aberration as that fairly recent paperback anthology of short stories which had also contained *The Invisible Man.* When I found, in what I swear was the last and lowest pocket, was someone's obviously feeble and pathetic idea of what an SF magazine should be.

Though its cover did feature a feline centaur hefting a spear, the painting was all in greens and blacks —the only red was on one space suit in the far distance, you could barely tell there was a female in the painting at all, and there were, as I recall, no bright yellows whatsoever. Flipping through the interior illustrations, I found not even one short-skirted lady with big breasts; in fact it was clear to me that the magazine was limping along with the least talented artists in the business. As for the table of contents, it was packed solid with names I'd never heard of, among them that of the editor.

Well, I bought it anyway, as a sort of charity case — cost me 25 cents, or two days' lunch money — and by and large I have not regretted it. The lead novelette was "The Storm," by A. E. van Vogt, which I recommend to anyone who has been reading lead stories all called "Thunder in The Void'; right behind that was Raymond F. Jones's "Fifty Million Monkeys," then a Frederic Brown short about what killed the dinosaurs (big slingshots), then "The Proud Robot," still to my mind the funniest piece of SF ever written, by (I did not know this) the author of "Thunder in The Void" writing under another name. And so out to the back of the book, via an Eric Frank Russell story.

Now that kind of stuff all in one place will, I guarantee it, get your attention. Lewis Padgett's (Henry Kuttner's) "The Proud Robot," for instance, is not merely funny. If you round a corner and encounter it after some years of reading undiluted pulp science fiction, it will knock you on your can. First of all, it's based on a genuinely SFnal funny idea, as the occasional bits of "humor" writing in the other magazines were not. Second, it's a trapdoor idea. Under the immediate surface is a powerful precis of both the strengths and the limitations in "modern" science fiction as it was being practiced under the editorship of John W. Campbell, Jr. If you're twelve, you don't think in those terms, but you do react to the power.

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And, mind you, you're already reeling from your first encounter with the concept of contraterrene matter, modular starships, instant Pavolovian conditioning, and interpenetrative brain cells all in the first thousand words of the van Vogt, the concept of randomly produced coherent data in the Jones, the outrageous if conventional humor in the Brown, plus a Campbell editorial and a genuine science article — on tidal waves, by Malcolm Jameson — that are all singing at you, at the tops of their voices, with the news that you are home at last.

Let me tell you, I was waiting for the next issue, whose cover was, as I recall, brown, and didn't have a woman on it at all. (It turned out that the October, 1943 was the wildest, pulpiest cover on *ASF* in years before or after.) In it were stories by George O. Smith (whose spaceships were propelled by vacuum tube and performed a mid-course maneuver called "turnover" which Flash Gordon had never had to employ), another van Vogt, another Padgett sequelizing "The Proud Robot," a Murray Leinster I didn't know was by Will F. Jenkins, recently author of *Startling's* complete novel, "The Giant Runt," an R. S. Richardson science article which made two literate and genuinely informative ones in a world where I'd previously had to make do with Leroy Yerxa fillers in *Amazing*, and, at last! a name with which I was familiar: Isaac Asimov.

Now, then — how so? Well, as a good *Planet Stories* reader, though a relatively recent one, I was familiar with the existence of a story called "Black Friar of The Flame," which had caused some stir, and with the name of its author. In *The Visigraph, Planet*'s vigorous and now-legendary letter column, the name of its author was constantly being mis-spelled, and he didn't like it. I could sympathize with that; in a nation made up entirely of immigrants, and one in which those of Anglo-Saxon descent were a distinct minority, it was nevertheless a cultural fetish to systematically mangle any name more complicated than "Smith" — or is it "Smythe"?

I was furthermore familiar with the existence of a letter-writer named "Isaac Asenion," who had apparently made a name for himself with cavils and carpings on a variety of subjects, and had come to be considered so vile by everyone, himself included, that he was in the process of disappearing from the face of the Earth. It was no trick of the mind to deduce who this Asenion chap might be, and I further leapt to the conclusion that the intended pronunciation rhymed with "assinine," rather than "I seen yon" as most SF historians have it. Hence, it was a defensive piece of self-conscious self-denigration, of a kind with which I was somewhat familiar.

And so, although I had found *Planet* just too late to read "Black

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Friar" (which is the sketch from which the *Foundation* series was later developed), or even any Asenion letters, I could see his footprints and the hole driven through the undergrowth where everyone was pointing. From these clues I was able to deduce the length of his tusks, the girth of his tail, and his shy smile. Ergo, when I saw his byline in *Astounding* I instantly seized my chance to learn more about this person I knew, and thus another piece of magic occurred.

"Death Sentence" is a gimmick story, rather more fervid than a twelve-year-old can detect, set in one of those galactic empires where everyone is very smug. (It is, you might say, the sort of empire Asimov might set up for a fall, and you can see its echoes in such books as *Foundation's Edge*.) The thing about "Death Sentence," though, is that in order to get to the gimmick last line, which even a twelve-year-old can anticipate, you have to pass through such notions as the idea of self-reproducing robots with organic bodies and brains, robots who are in effect simplified versions of their makers and lacking in such safety features as multiple hearts, and furthermore robots who have no idea they are robots.

Contraterrene matter ain't in it; I was two years away from physics class, and when I got there, my instructor thought the chemical symbol for the element Mercury was Mk. I just didn't have the referents, and wouldn't have until I'd read enough additional *Astoundings* to learn some science. Random creativity won't quite do it, either. Miss Theresa Henzie was one hell of an Algebra teacher, but that's still a bit short of the necessary mathematical image, which, again, John Campbell eventually taught me (and which then turned up in a novel of mine a mere thirty-three years later). The concepts in the van Vogt and the Jones, and in many other ASF writers, I could file away and gradually accrete further data on. But you don't need any prior grounding to grasp what the Asimov says, then take it and run with it. By and large, the stuff in the previous issue had been the fireworks and the fanfares; the Asimov gave me something I could dance with right away.

That's what he does. He knows a lot of stuff with formulas to memorize and exponents to tuck in the right places, but when he tells it to you, all you need to use is common sense. It's not just in the science articles; it's in the stories, which are not about science. Asimov would have had a very difficult life as a physician; he would have cared far too much about each of his patients. Nor is it hard to see why various experienced researchers resisted his attempts at establishing a career among them. On paper, his intellect can bend his expression into almost any desired format. To be in the same room with

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him, however, is to very swiftly realize he and dispassion are strangers.

He is exactly where he belongs, doing exactly what he should. That's a conclusion I'm not sure he's entirely come to, even yet, but it's one he came to as an operational policy over a span of some ten years, beginning with the 1940 publication of "The Cosmic Corkscrew" in *Astonishing* and culminating with the publication of *Pebble in The Sky,* his first novel.

The published work of that decade and the evolutions within Isaac are embodied in the *Early Asimov* volumes, which have been out of print for some time. Originally one Doubleday hardback in 1972, they were split in two and given some expanded introductory material for a Fawcett (Crest ?) edition in 1974. Their Del Rey republication now is a long overdue return to public access.

It's not just the stories, of which there are over twenty-five, including "Death Sentence" and "Black Friar of The Flame." Starting with his first sale, these work their way up the years, skipping only over such pieces as "Nightfall," which are readily available elsewhere. Of the stories in these two books, every one was good enough to be published, and any one might easily have sparked some fruitful reaction in one or more of its readers . . . might readily do it yet, were you to buy these books and read them.

Read them, as well, for the notes of memorabilia included among them. The story of Isaac's development as a writer, and as a person in those years, emerges in a way that seems more accessible than it does when the autobiography is in one set of volumes and the stories are in others. Here is the man, here is the work, here is the gist of the discussions with John Campbell and Frederik Pohl, here is what Malcolm Reiss, managing *Planet Stories*, did with "Black Friar of The Flame," rather to Isaac's chagrin, and here is what Campbell did with the *Foundation* series idea, much to Isaac's astonishment and then to his gladness as he picked up the idea again and ran with it, and ran. It's a window on a world, a marvelous, marvelous world.

The world it was has been splendidly limned over the years by the inspired anthology series created by Isaac with Martin Harry Greenberg. This latest one is the fourteenth in *The Great SF Stories* series, and covers the top stories of 1952. There is a Greenberg introduction recalling the major mundane and SFnal events of the year, and then each story is preceded by useful, sapient comments from both editors. Marty's contributions tend to be historical and statistical; Isaac talks with enthusiasm about the story's ideas.

Earlier books in the series marched up through the Golden Age, year by year; 1952 is a little different. Among

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these nineteen stories, the proportion of contributions from *Astounding* is 'way down; the names on the contents page include Asimov (with "The Martian Way," a memorable piece), and Fritz Leiber and Eric Frank Russell. But the other names are such as Ray Bradbury, Robert Sheckley, Alfred Bester, Katherine MacLean, Cyril Kornbluth, Walter M. Miller, Jr., Philip José Farmer and Edmond Hamilton. The Hamilton is the famous "What's it Like Out There?"; the two Bradburys are "The Pedestrian" and "The Sound of Thunder," the Farmer is "Sail On! Sail On!") Even the Asimov is from *Galaxy*. This is the volume that commemorates a breakpoint; the Golden Age — or, rather, a particular Golden Age — was over.

Doesn't stop the 1952 stories from being very good reading. In fact, the effect of the book is to be much more like contemporary SF than some of the earlier volumes were. And that is apart from the salutary effect of seeing, once again, how effectively Greenberg's good scholarship and Asimov's creative insight combined with the respect they both bring to these labors of love. I don't see how you can lay claim to a basic library of SF and not have these books in it.

And then there are the alternate Asimovs. Actually, there is *The Alternate Asimovs*, billed on the cover as containing the original unpublished version of *Pebble in The Sky, The End of Eternity,* and "Belief." Actually, there's a bit more than that. Apart from some valuable Asimov commentary, we get both versions of "Belief."

It seems it is not quite true, what I have been telling you over the years — John W. Campbell did not reject *Pebble in The Sky*. He rejected *Grow Old Along With Me,* a 40,000-word "complete novel" that had been commissioned but rejected by *Startling Stories* (that is, I assume, Sam Merwin, Jr.), and then shown to Campbell. It would have died in that form, but Frederik Pohl, as Isaac's agent, suggested showing it to Doubleday as the basis for a longer version should their Walter Bradbury want one, which he did. (Walter Bradbury is the man who had just finished explaining to Lloyd Eshbach, proprietor of Fantasy Press, why there was no future in SF book publishing.)

It is Marty Greenberg who came up with the idea for this book, and titled it. I find it a stroke of genius, on three — no four — counts. One, this is the usual sort of friendly Asimov storytelling book, and it is good to have another. Two, the memoir copy and the inclusion of both versions of "Belief" add still more to our picture of the field and one of its premier practitioners. Three, the stories are good reading. And, four, I can tell you my anecdote about *Pebble in The Sky,* a novel for which I hold an indelible fondness and vast respect:

Some time reasonably soon after it appeared, I coincidentally left my

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briefly held first editorial job — at Gnome Press — for a job as the assistant editor at *Galaxy* magazine, which was where a lot of good stories and people had gone from *Astounding*. I went right back to *Astounding*, but that's another story. Meanwhile, during my tenurette at *Galaxy* I not only read proof and edited copy on the magazine under deservedly scrupulous supervision, I also became in effect the managing editor of *Galaxy Novels*. Horace Gold bought them, and after that it was up to me to get them into print with as little fuss as possible. No one looked over my shoulder; who would want to, and what could go wrong?

When *Galaxy* first appeared, it was accompanied on the newsstands each month by a "Complete and Unabridged" reprint novel in the identical physical format and at the same price. The first of these was *Sinister Barrier*, from *Unknown, Astounding*'s pre-War companion, and immediately Street & Smith Publishing realized *Galaxy* was a serious rival to its *Astounding*, access to any further *Unknown* or *Astounding* material was cut off. The result was a momentous scramble at *Galaxy Novels*, and among the suggestions hastily made was the reprinting of *Pebble in The Sky*.

Now, Isaac's desirable byline had already resulted in the very recent publication of the book in *Two Complete Science-Adventure Books*, a short-lived reprint periodical that was sister to *Planet* Stories. You are not to think that "complete" meant these "novels" were at their original length. It only meant that the beginning, middle and end of some approximate version of the original were all in there somewhere in that one issue, snuggled cheek by cheek with some other "novel", both crammed into a space perhaps adequate for one.

Now, ours, on the other hand . . .

Well, what had happened was that the whole book had been set in type from the Doubleday version, and it now seemed that publishing economics dictated a page-count more in line with profitability. Furthermore, time was short. And so to me — to me, the unlicked cub — fell the task of taking the galley proofs home that night and coming back to *Galaxy* in the morning with 20,000 words taken out of them. There was no hope whatever of simply picking up the version created by Jerry Bixby or Malcolm Reiss at *2CSAB*, since it would have meant a complete reset.

Actually, the size of the required cut was expressed not in words, but in lines. In that day's printing technology, each line represented an actual metal casting — a "slug" — with all of that line's words set on it by Intertype. You cannot cut a galley the way you would a manuscript, going perhaps word by word. You go slug by slug, in effect lifting slugs out of a tray called a galley. If you do anything else — if you for instance cut half the

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words on a slug — a new slug must be cast. Furthermore, it is almost certain that many subsequent slugs will have to be recast in order to re-create the straight edges and filled space that convention demands of typeset copy. This of course creates many opportunities for fresh typographical errors. It also costs money, whereas the object of my exercise was to make money.

So what you do, when you cut in galleys, is you find unnecessary paragraphs, and lift them out. That's your first pass, and as the evening progresses and the count of cut lines fails to rise precipitously, one's standard of what is necessary undergoes certain evolutions.

Next, you go into the dialogue exchanges and see whether they might not make just as much sense with some of the middle lines excised. Oddly enough, this often works smoothly. With many writers, so does the paragraph-lifting. Not quite so with Isaac.

Now you're getting into the short strokes. You start looking for lines — perhaps the last lines of paragraphs, sometimes lines internal to paragraphs — which could go both as (more or less) expendable wordage and as slugs.

Then you bite the bullet. You begin breaking slugs, but you do it with agonizing parsimony, and only as dawn is peeping in and you've still got not column-inches but column-feet to go. The long, smudged, marked-up proofs surge back and forth in your shuffling fingers. The happy times of paragraph-cutting — perhaps even *section*-cutting — are as a remote dream of squandered luxuries. Now you're looking at individual words. Any paragraph with just a few letters in its last line is potential prey. Turn a world like "concatenation" into "mess" and perhaps the sentence shortens by a whole slug!

But there comes a moment when you realize it's hopeless. All possible lesser characters are gone, with their sub-plots. Hamlet's soliloquy is down to "I'm seriously depressed," and every page is a solid column of type; hardly one paragraph has a short tail and some white space. And not enough is gone. Half a chapter's worth of type has yet got to get lost.

Birds are chirping outside my window and leaping into frenzied escape at the attack of any one of the dozen cats who share bed and board with me in Lester del Rey's cold water flat. From over in distant Stuyvesant Town, where *Galaxy* dwells, I can already hear my character and talent being questioned. What to do? *What* to do?

Why, one drops a sequence of Asimov's scenes entire, and writes a new short one of one's own, that's what. And that's why there are more alternate Asimovs than you ever suspected.

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Judith Moffett teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of four books: two of poetry, one of criticism, one of translations from the Swedish, for which she received a prize from the Swedish Academy. Her first SF story initially evokes memories of Tarzan but grows into something quite different and fascinating...

Surviving

BY

JUDITH MOFFETT

For nearly eighteen years I've been keeping a secret to honor the memory of someone, now pretty certainly dead, who didn't want it told. Yet over those years I've come gradually to feel uncomfortable with the idea of dying without recording what I know — to believe that science would be pointlessly cheated thereby, and Sally, too; and just lately, but with a growing urgency, I've also felt the need to write an account of my own actions into the record.

Yet it's difficult to begin. The events I intend to set down have never, since they happened, been out of my mind for a day; nevertheless the prospect of reexperiencing them is painful and my silence the harder to break on that account.

I'll start, I guess, with the afternoon an exuberant colleague I scarcely knew at the time spotted me through the glass door and barged into the psychology department office calling, "Hey, Jan, you're the expert on the Chimp Child — wait'll you hear this, you're not gonna believe it!"

People were always dashing to inform me of some item, mostly inconsequential, relating to this subject. I glanced across at John from the wall of mailboxes, hands full of memos and late papers, one eyebrow probably raised. "What now?"

"We've ***hired*** her!" And when I continued to look blank: "No kidding, I was just at a curriculum committee meeting in the dean's office, and Raymond Lickorish in Biology was there, and he told me: they've definitely given Sally Barnes a tenure-track appointment, to replace that old guy who's retiring this year, what's his name, Ferrin. The virus

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man. Raymond says Barnes's Ph.D. research was something on viruses and the origin of life on earth and her published work is all first-rate and she did well in the interview — he wasn't there so he didn't meet her, but they were all talking about it afterward — and she seems eager to leave England. So the department made her an offer and she accepted! She'll be here in September, I swear to God!"

By this point I'm sure I was showing all the incredulous excitement and delight a bearer of happy tidings could possibly have wished. And no wonder: I wrote my *dissertation* on Sally Barnes; I went into psychology chiefly because of the intense interest her story held for me. In fact the Chimp Child had been a kind of obsession of mine — part hobby, part mania — for a long time. I was a college freshman, my years of Tarzan games in the woods less far behind me than you might suppose, in 1990, when poachers hauled the screeching, scratching, biting, terrified white girl into a Tanzanian village and told its head man they would be back to collect the reward. Electrified, I followed the breaking story from day to day.

The girl was quickly and positively identified as Sally, the younger daughter of Martin and Hilary Barnes, Anglican missionary teachers at a secondary school in the small central African republic of Malawi, who had been killed when the lightplane in which they and she were traveling from Kigoma had crashed in the jungle. A helicopter rescue crew found only the pilot's body in the burned-out fuselage. Scavengers may have dragged the others away and scattered the bones; improbable survivors of the crash may have tried to walk out — the plane had come down in the mountains, something less than 150 kilometers east of Lake Tanganyika — and starved, or been killed by anything from leopards to thieves to fever. However it was, nothing had been heard or seen of the Barnes family after that day in 1981; it was assumed that one way or another all three had died in the bush.

No close living relatives remained in England. An older daughter, left at home that weekend with an attack of malaria, had been sent to an Anglican school for the children of missionaries, somewhere in the Midlands. There was no one but the church to assume responsibility for her sister the wild girl, either.

The bureaucracies of two African nations and the Church of England hummed, and after a day or two Sally was removed to the Malosa School in Southern Malawi, where the whole of her life before the accident had been lived. She could neither speak nor understand English, seemed stunned, and masturbated constantly. She showed no recognition of the school, its grounds or buildings, or the peo-

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ple there who had been friendly with her as a small child. But when they had cleaned her up, and cropped her matted hair, *they* recognized that child in *her*; pictures of Sally at her fourth birthday party, printed side by side in the papers with new ones of the undersized thirteen-year-old she had become, were conclusive. Hers was one of those faces that looks essentially the same at six and sixty.

But if the two faces obviously belonged to the same person, there was a harrowing difference.

A long time later Sally told me, gazing sadly at this likeness of herself: "Shock. It was nothing but shock, nothing more beastly. On top of everything else, getting captured must have uncovered my memories of the plane crash — violence; noise; confusion; my parents screaming, then not answering me — I mean, when the poachers started shooting and panicked everybody, and then killed the Old Man and flung that net over me, I fought and struggled, of course, but in the end I sort of went blank. Like the accident, but in reverse."

"Birth Trauma Number Three?" We were sitting cross-legged on the floor before the fireplace in my living room, naked under blankets, like Mohegan. I could imagine the scene vividly, had in fact imagined it over and over: the brown child blindly running, running, in the green world, the net spreading, dropping in slow motion, the child pitching with a crash into wet vegetation. Helplessness. Claustrophia. Uttermost bowel-emptying terror. The hysterical shrieks, the rough handling . . . Sally patted my thigh, flushed from the fire's heat, then let her hand stay where it was.

"No point looking like that. What if they *hadn't* found me then? At University College, you know, they all think it was only just in time."

"And having read my book, you know I think so, too." We smiled; I must have pressed my palm flat to her hot, taut belly, or slipped my hand behind her knee or cupped her breast — some such automatic response. "The wonder is that after that double trauma they were able to get you back at all. You had to have been an awfully resilient, tough kid, as well as awfully bright. A survivor in every sense. Or you'd have died of shock and grief after the plane crashed, or of shock and grief when the poachers picked you up, or of grief and despair in England from all that testing and training, like spending your adolescence in a pressure cooker." I can remember nuzzling her shoulder, how my ear grazed the rough blanket. "You're a survivor, Sal."

In the firelight Sally smiled wanly. "Mm. Up to a point."

Any standard psych text published after 2003 will describe Sally Barnes as the only feral child in history to whom, before her final disappearance, full functional humanity had been restored. From the age of four and a

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half until just past her thirteenth birthday, Sally acted as a member of a troop of chimpanzees in the Tanzanian rain forest; from sixteen or seventeen onward, she was a young Englishwoman, a person. What sort of person? The books are vague on this point. Psychologists, naturally enough, were wild to know; Sally herself, who rather thought she did know, was wild to prevent them from turning her inside out all her life in the interest of Science. I was (and am) a psychologist and a partisan, but professional integrity is one thing and obsession is quite another, and if I choose finally to set the record straight it's not because I respect Sally's own choice any less.

From the very first, of course, I'd been madly infatuated with the *idea* of Sally, in whose imagined consciousness — that of a human girl accepted by wild creatures as one of themselves — I saw, I badly wished to see, myself. The extreme harshness of such a life as hers had been — with its parasites, cold rains, bullying of the weak by the strong, and so forth — got neatly edited out of this hyperromantic conception; yet the myth had amazing force. I don't know how many times I read the *Jungle Books* and the best of the Tarzan novels between the ages of eight and fifteen, while my mother hovered uneasily in the background, dropping hints about eye makeup and stylish clothes. Pah.

So that later, when a real apechild emerged from a real jungle and the Sunday supplements and popular scientific magazines were full of her story, for me it was an enthralling and fabulous thing, one that made it possible to finish growing up, at graduate school, *inside* the myth: a myth not dispelled but amplified, enhanced, by scientific scrutiny. The more one looked at what had happened to Sally, the more wonderful it seemed.

Her remarkable progress had been minutely documented, and I had read every document and published half a dozen of my own, including my dissertation. It was established that she had talked early and could even read fairly well before the accident, and that her early family history had been a happy, stable one; all we experts were agreed that these crucial factors explained how Sally, alone among feral children, had been able to develop, or reacquire normal language skills in later life. She was therefore fortunate in her precocity; fortunate, too, in her foster society of fellow primates. Almost certainly she could not have recovered, or recovered so completely, from eight years of life as a wolf or a gazelle. Unlike Helen Keller, she had never been sensually deprived; unlike Kaspar Hauser, also sensually deprived, she had not been isolated from social relations — wild chimpanzees provide one another with plenty of those; unlike the wolf girls of India, she had learned language before her period of absten-

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tion from the use of it. And like Helen Keller, Sally had a very considerable native intelligence to assist her.

It may seem odd that despite frequent trips to England, I had never tried to arrange a meeting with the subject of all this fascinated inquiry, but in some way my fixation made me shy, and I would end each visit by deciding that another year would do as well or better. That Sally might come to America, and to my own university, and to stay, was a wholly unlooked-for development. Now that chance had arranged it, however, shyness seemed absurd. Not only would we meet, we would become friends. Everyone would expect us to, and nothing seemed more natural.

My grandfather used to claim, with a forgiving chuckle, that his wedding night had been the biggest disappointment of his life. I thought bleakly of him the September evening of the annual cocktail party given by the dean of arts and sciences so that the standing faculty could make the acquaintance of their newly hired colleagues. A lot of people knew about Sally Barnes, of course, and among psychologists she was really famous, a prodigy; everybody wanted to meet her, and more than a few wanted to be there when *I* met her, to witness the encounter. I was exasperated with myself for being so nervous, as well as annoyed that the meeting would occur under circumstances so public, but when the moment arrived and I was actually being introduced to Sally — the dean had stationed himself beside her to handle the crush, and did the honors himself — these feelings all proved maddeningly beside the point.

There she stood, the Chimp Child of all my theories and fantasies: a small, utterly ordinary-seeming and -sounding young woman who touched my hand with purely mechanical courtesy. The plain black dress did less than nothing for her plain pale face and reddish hair; history's only rehabilitated feral child was a person you wouldn't look at twice in the street, or even once. That in itself meant nothing; but her expression, too, was indifferent and blank, and she spoke without any warmth at all, in an "educated" English voice pitched rather high: "How d'you do, a pleasure to meet you . . ." There she actually stood, saying her canned phrase to *me*, sipping from her clear plastic container of white wine, giving away nothing at all.

I stared at the pale, round, unfamiliar face whose shape and features I knew so well, unable to believe in it or let go of the hand that felt so hard in mine. The room had gradually grown deafening. Bright, curious eyes had gathered round us. The moment felt utterly weird and wrong. Dean Eccles, perhaps supposing his difficult charge had failed to catch my name, chirped helpfully, "Of course Janet is the author of that fascinating

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book about *you*," and beamed at Sally as if to say, *There* now, you lucky girl!"

Only a flicker of eyelids betrayed her. "Oh, I see," she said, but her hand pulled out of mine with a little yank as she spoke, and she looked pointedly past me toward the next person in the receiving line — a snub so obvious that even the poor dean couldn't help but notice. Flustered, he started to introduce the elderly English professor Sally's attention had been transferred to.

We had hardly exchanged a dozen words. Suddenly I simply had to salvage something from the wreck of the occasion. "Look — could I call you in a week or two? Maybe we could get together for lunch or a drink or something after you're settled in?"

"Ah, I'm afraid I'll be rather busy for quite some time," said the cool voice, not exactly to me. "Possibly I might ring you if I happen to be free for an hour one afternoon." Then she was speaking to the old gentleman and I had been eased out of the circle of shoulders and that was that.

I went home thoroughly despondent and threw myself on the sofa. An hour or so later, the phone rang: John, who had witnessed the whole humiliating thing. "Listen, she acted that way with *everybody*, I watched her for an hour. Then I went through the line and she acted like that with *me*. She was probably jet-lagged or hates being on display — she was just pretending to drink that wine, by the way, sip, sip, sip, but the level never went down the whole time I was watching. You shouldn't take it personally, Jan. I doubt she had any idea who you were in that mob of freak-show tourists."

"Oh, she knew who I was, all right, but that doesn't make you wrong. O.K., thanks. I just wish the entire department hadn't been standing around with their tongues hanging out, waiting to see us fall weeping on each other's necks." Realizing I wasn't sure which I minded more, the rejection or its having been witnessed in that way, made me feel less tragic. I said good night to John, then went and pulled down the foldable attic stairs, put on the light, and scrounged among cartons till I found the scrapbook; this I brought downstairs and brooded over, soothed by a glass of rosé.

The scrapbook was fat. The Chimp Child had been an international sensation when first reclaimed from the wild, and for years thereafter picture essays and articles had regularly appeared where I could clip or copy them. I had collected dozens of photographs of Sally: arriving at Heathrow, a small, oddly garbed figure, face averted, clinging to a uniformed attendant; dressed like an English schoolgirl at fifteen, in blazer and tie, working at a table with the team of psychologists at University College,

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London; on holiday with the superb teacher Carol Cheswick, who had earned a place for herself in the educators' pantheon beside Jean-Marc Itard and Annie Sullivan by virtue of her brilliant achievements with Sally; greeting Jane Goodall, very old and frail, on one of Goodall's last visits to England; in her rooms at Newnham College, Cambridge, an average-looking undergraduate.

The Newnham pictures were not very good, or so I had always thought. Only now that I'd seen her in person . . . I turned back to the yellow newspaper clipping, nearly twenty years old, of a wild thing with matted, sawed-off hair; and now for the first time the blank face beneath struck me as queerly like this undergraduate's, and like the face I had just been trying to talk to at the party. The expressive adolescent's face brought into being sometime during the nineties — what had become of it? Who was Sally Barnes, after all? That precocious, verbally gifted little girl . . . I closed the cover, baffled. Whoever she was, she had long since passed the stage of being studied without her consent.

Yet I wanted so badly to know her. As fall wore on to winter, I would often see her on campus, walking briskly, buttoned up in her silver coat with a long black scarf wrapped round her, appearing to take no notice of whatever leaves or slush or plain brickwork happened to be underfoot, or of the milling, noisy students. She always carried reading equipment and a black shoulder bag. Invariably she would be alone. I doubt that I can convey more than a dim impression of the bewilderment and frustration with which the sight of her affected me thoughout those slow, cold months. I knew every detail of the special education of Sally Barnes, the dedication of her teachers, her own eagerness to learn; and there had been *nothing,* nothing at all, to suggest that once "restored to human status," she would become ordinary — nothing to foreshadow this standoffish dullness. Of course it was understandable that she would not wish to be quizzed constantly about her life in the wild; rumor got round of several instances when somebody unintimidated by her manner had put some question to her and been served with a snappish "Sorry, I don't talk about that." But was it credible that the child whom this unique experience had befallen had been, as her every word and action now implied, a particularly unfriendly, unoriginal, bad-tempered child who thereafter had scuttled straight back to sour conventionality as fast as ever she could?

I simply did not believe it. She had to be deceiving us deliberately. But I couldn't imagine why, nor entirely trust my own intuition: I wanted far too badly to believe that *no* human being who had been a wild animal for a time, and then become human again, could possibly really be the sort of

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human Sally seemed to be.

And yet why not (I would argue with myself)? Why doubt that a person who had fought so hard for her humanity might desire, above all else, the life of an ordinary human?

But is it ordinary to be so antisocial (I would argue back)? Of course she never got in touch with me. A couple of weeks after the party, I nerved myself up enough to call her office and suggest meeting for lunch. The brusqueness of that refusal took some getting over; I let a month go by before trying again. "I'm sorry," she said. "But what was it you wanted to discuss? Perhaps we could take care of it over the phone."

"The idea wasn't to discuss anything, particularly. I only thought — new people sometimes find it hard to make their way here at first, it's not a very friendly university. And then, naturally I'd like to — well, just talk. Get acquainted. Get to know you a bit."

"Thanks, but I'm tremendously busy, and in any event there's very little I could say." And then, after a pause: "Someone's come to the door. Thanks for ringing."

It was no good, she would have nothing to do with me, beyond speaking when we met on campus — I could, and did, force her to take that much notice of me. Where was she living? I looked it up, an address in the suburbs, not awfully far from mine. Once I pedaled past the building, a shabby older high-rise, but there was no way of telling which of the hundreds of windows might be hers. I put John up to questioning his committee acquaintance in Biology, learning in this way: that Sally had cooly repulsed every social overture from people in her department, without exception; that student gossip styled her a Britishly reserved but better-than-competent lecturer; that she was hard at work in the lab on some project she never discussed with anybody. Not surprisingly, her fellow biologists had soon lost interest. She had speedily trained us all to leave her alone.

The psych department lost interest also, not without a certain tiresome belaboring of me, jokes about making silk purses out of chimps' ears and Ugly Chimplings and the like. John overheard a sample of this feeble mailbox badinage one day and retorted with some heat, "Hey, Janet only said she's *human* in that book. If education made you nice and personable, I know lots of people around here besides Sally Barnes who could stand to go back to school." But John, embroiled in a romance with a first-year graduate student, now found Sally a dull subject himself; besides, what he had said was true. My thesis had not been invalidated, nor Carol Cheswick and the team at King's College overrated. It was simply the case, in fact, that within six months of her arrival, Sally — billed in advance as an

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exotic ornament to the university — had compelled us all to take her for neither more nor less than the first-rate young microbiologist she had come among us to be.

My personal disappointment grew by degrees less bitter. But still I would see the silver coat and subduedly fashionable boots, all points and plastic, moving away across the quad and think: Lady, had it been given unto me to be the Chimp Child, by God I'd have made a better job of it than you do!

Spring came. Between the faculty club and the library, the campus forsythia erupted along its straggling branches, the azaleas flowered as usual a week earlier in the city than in my garden fifteen miles away. Ridley Creek, in the nearby state park, roared with rains and snowmelt and swarmed with stocked trout and bulky anglers; and cardinals and titmice, visible all winter at the feeders, abruptly began to sing. Every winter I used to lose interest in the park between the first of February and the middle of March; every spring rekindled my sense of the luck and privilege of having it so near. During the first weeks of trout season, the trails, never heavily used, were virtually deserted, and any sunny day my presence was not required in town I would stuff a sandwich, a pocket reader, and a blanket into a daypack and pedal to the park. Generally I stayed close to the trails, but would sometimes tough my way through some brambly thicket of blackberry or raspberry canes, bright with small new chartreuse-colored leaves, to find a private spot where I could take off my shirt in safety.

Searching for this sort of retreat in a tract of large beech trees one afternoon in April, I came carefully and painfully through a tangle of briars to be thunderstruck by the sight of young Professor Barnes where she seemed at once least and most likely to be: ten meters up in one of the old beeches. She was perfectly naked. She sat poised on a little branch, one shoulder set against the smooth gray bole of the bare tree, one foot dangling, the opposite knee cocked on the branch, the whole posture graced by a naturalness that smote me with envy in the surreal second or two before she caught sight of me. She was rubbing herself, and seemed to be crying.

One after another, like blows, these impressions whammed home in the instant of my emerging. The next instant Sally's face contorted with rage, she screamed, snapped off and threw a piece of dead branch at me (and hit me, too, in the breastbone), and was down the tree and running almost faster than I could take in what had happened, what was still happening. While part of my brain noted with satisfaction, *She didn't hear me coming!* a different part gal-

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vanized my frenzied shouting: "No! Sally, for God's sake, stop! Stop! Come back here, I won't tell anybody, I won't, I swear!. *Sally!"* Unable to move, to chase her, I could only go on yelling in this semihysterical vein; I felt that if she got away now, I would not be able to bear it. I'd have been heard all over that side of the park if there had been anybody to hear, outside the zone of noise created by the creek. It was the racket I was making, in fact, that made her come pelting back — that, and the afterthought that all her clothes were back there under the tree, and realizing I had recognized her.

"All right, I'm not going anywhere, now *shut up!"* she called in a low, furious voice, crashing through undergrowth. She stomped right up to me barefoot and looked me in the eye. "God damn it to hell. What will you take to keep your mouth shut?" Did she mean right now? But I *had* stopped shouting. My heart went right on lurching about like a tethered frog, though, and the next moment the view got brighter and began to drift off to the right. I sat down abruptly on something damp.

"I was scared witless you wouldn't come back. Wait a second, let me catch my breath."

"You're the one who wrote that book, Morgan," she said between her teeth. "God damn it to *hell."* In a minute she sat down, too, first pushing aside the prickly stems unthinking. The neutral face that gave away nothing had vanished. Sally Barnes, angry and frightened, looked exactly as I had wished to see her look; incredibly, after so much fruitless fantasy, here we were in the woods together. Here she sat, scratching a bare breast with no more special regard than if it had been a nose or a shoulder. It was pretty overwhelming. I couldn't seem to pull myself together.

Sally's skin had turned much darker than mine already, all over — plainly this was not her first visit to the bare-branched woods. Her breasts were smallish, her three tufts of body hair reddish, and all her muscles large and smooth and well-molded as a gymnast's. I said what came into my head: "I was a fairly good tree-climber as a kid, but I could never have gotten up one with a trunk as thick as that, and those high, skinny branches. Do you think if I built my arms and shoulders up, lifted weights or something — I mean, would you teach me? Or maybe I'm too old," I said. "My legs aren't in such bad shape, I run a few kilometers three times a week, but the top half of my body is a flabby mess—"

"Don't play stupid games," Sally burst out furiously. "You had to come blundering in here today, you're the worst luck I ever had. I'm asking again: Will you take money not to tell anyone you saw me? Or is there something else you want? If I can get it,

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you can have it, only you've *got* to keep quiet about seeing me out here like this."

"That's a rotten way to talk to people!" I said, furious myself. "I was blundering around in these woods for years before you ever set foot in them. And I'm sorry if you don't like my book, or is it just me you don't like? Or just psychologists? If it weren't for you, I probably wouldn't even *be* one." My voice wobbled up and down, I'd been angry with Sally for seven months. "Don't worry, I won't say anything. You don't need to bribe me."

"Yes, but you will, you see. Sooner or later you'll be at some dinner party, and someone will ask what the Chimp Child is like, *really*" — I looked slantwise at her; this had already happened a couple of times — "and you won't be able to resist. 'There I was, walking along minding my own business, and whomever do you think I saw — stark naked and gone right up a tree like a monkey!' Christ," Sally said through her teeth, "I could *throttle* you. Everything's spoiled." She got up hastily; I could feel how badly she wanted to clobber me again.

But I was finally beginning to be able to think, and to call upon my expertise. "Well, then, make me *want* not to tell. Make it a question of self-interest. I don't want money, but I wasn't kidding: I'd absolutely love to be able to get around in a forest like a chimp does. Teach me to climb like one — like you do. If the story gets out, the deal's off. Couldn't you agree to that?"

Sally's look meant, "What kind of idiot do you take me for?" Quickly I said, "I know it sounds crazy, but all through my childhood — and most of my adolescence, too — for whatever wacky reason, I wanted in the *worst* way to be Tarzan! And for the past twenty years, I've gone on wanting even more to be *you*! I don't know why — it's irrational, one of those passions people develop for doing various weird things, being fans or collecting stamps or — I used to know a former world champion fly-caster who'd actually gone fishing only a couple of times in his life!" I drew a deep breath, held it, let it out in a burst of words: "Look — even if I don't understand it, I *know* that directly behind *The Chimp Child and the Human Family* — and the whole rest of my career, for that matter — is this ten-year-old kid who'd give anything to be Tarzan swinging through the trees with the Great Apes. I can promise that so long as you were coaching me, you'd be safe. I'll never get a better chance to act out part of that fantasy, and it would be worth —just everything! One *hell* of a lot more than keeping people entertained at some dinner party, I'll tell you that!"

"You don't want to be me," said Sally in a flat voice. "I was right the first time; it's a stupid game you're

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playing at." She looked at me distastefully, but I could see that at any rate she believed me now.

The ground was awfully damp. I got up, starting to feel vastly better. Beech limbs webbed the sky; strong sunshine and birdsong poured through web; it was all I could do, suddenly, not to howl and dance among the trees. I could see she was going to say yes.

Sally set conditions, all of which I accepted promptly. I was not to ask snoopy professional questions, or do any nonessential talking. At school we were to go on as before, never revealing by so much as a look or gesture that an association existed between us. I was not to tell *anybody*. Sally could not, in fact, prevent my telling people, but I discovered that I hadn't any desire to tell. My close friends, none of whom lived within 150 kilometers of the city, could guess I was concealing a relationship but figured I would talk about it when I got ready; they tended to suppose a married man, reason enough for secrecy. Sally and I both taught our classes, and Sally had her work in the lab, and I my private patients.

Once in midweek and once each weekend, we met in the beech grove; and so the "lessons" got under way.

I acquired some light weights and began a program of exercise to strengthen my arms, shoulders, chest, and back, but the best way to build up the essential muscles was to climb a lot of trees. Before long the calluses at the base of each finger, which I had carried throughout my childhood, had been re-created (and I remembered then the hardness of Sally's palm when I'd shaken hands with her at the cocktail party in September). Seeing how steadily my agility and toughness increased, Sally was impressed and, in spite of herself, gratified. She was also nervous; she'd had no intention of letting herself enjoy this companionship that had been forced upon her.

It was a queer sort of blackmail. I went along patiently, working hard and trying to make my company too enjoyable to resist; and in this way the spring semester ended.

Sally was to teach summer school, I to prepare some articles for publication and continue to see my patients through the summer. By June all the trout had been hooked and the beech woods had grown risky; we found more inaccessible places on the riding-trail side of the park where I could be put through my training-exercise routines. By the Fourth of July my right biceps measured thirty-seven centimeters and Sally had finally begun to relax in my presence, even to trust me.

That we shortly became lovers should probably surprise nobody. All the reports describe the pre-accident Sally as an affectionate child, and her family as a loving one. From my reading I knew that in moments of anxi-

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ety or fear, chimps reassure one another by touching, and that in placid ones they reaffirm the social bond by reciprocal grooming. Yet for a decade, ever since Carol Cheswick died and she'd gone up to Cambridge, Sally had protected herself strictly against personal involvements, at the cost of denying herself all emotional and physical closeness. Cheswick, a plump, middle-aged, motherly person, had hugged and cuddled Sally throughout their years together, but after Cheswick's death — sick of the pokings and peerings of psychologists and of the curious public, resentful and guilty about the secret life she had felt compelled to create for herself — Sally had simply done without. Now she had me.

Except for the very beginning, in London, there had always been a secret life.

She abruptly started to talk about it late one horribly hot afternoon, at the end of a workout. We had dropped out of the best new training tree, a century-old white oak, then shaken out a ragged army blanket, sat on it cross-legged, and passed a plastic canteen and a bunch of seedless grapes between us. I felt sticky and spent, but elated. Sally looked me over critically. "You're filling out quite well, it's hard to believe these are the same scrawny shoulders." She kneaded the nearer shoulder with her hard hand, while I carefully concealed my intense awareness that except to correct an error, she had never touched me anywhere before. The hand slipped down, gripped my upper arm. When I "made a muscle" the backs of her brown fingers brushed my paletan breast; our eyes met, and I said lightly, "I owe it all to you coach," but went warmer still with pleasure and the rightness of these gestures, which had the feeling of a course correction.

Sally plucked several grapes and popped them in her mouth, looking out over the creek valley while she chewed. After a bit she said, "They let me go all to pot in London. All anybody cared about was guiding me out of the wilderness of ignorance, grafting my life at thirteen back onto the stump of my life at four and then making up for the lost years how they could. The lost years . . . mind you, they had their hands full, they all worked like navvies and so did I. But I'd got absolutely consumptive with longing for the bush before they brought Carol in, and she noticed and made them let me out for a fortnight's holiday in the countryside. I'd lost a lot of strength by then, but it was only just a year so it came back quick enough."

She stopped there, and I didn't dare say anything; we ate grapes and slapped mosquitoes. It was incredibly hot. After a bit, desperate to hear more, I was weighing the risks of a response when she went on without prodding:

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"At University College, though, they didn't much care to have me swinging about in trees. I think they felt, you know, 'Here *we* are, slaving away trying to drag the ape kid into the modern world, and what does she do the minute our backs are turned but go dashing madly back to her savage ways.' Sort of, 'Ungrateful little beast.' They *never* imagined I might miss that benighted life, or anything about it, but when I read *Tarzan of the Apes* myself a few years later, the part toward the end where Tarzan strips off his suit and tie and shoes and leaps into the branches swearing he'll never, never go back — I cried like anything."

I said, "What could you do about it, though?" breaking Sally's no-questions rule without either of us noticing.

"Oh, on my own, not much. But Carol had a lot to say about what I should and shouldn't do. They respected her tremendously. And she was marvelous. After I'd got so I could talk and read pretty well, she'd take me to the South Downs on weekends and turn me loose. We had a tacit agreement that if she didn't ask, I needn't tell. We were so close, she certainly knew I was getting stronger and my hands were toughening up, but *she* never took the view that those years in the wild were best forgotten. She arranged for me to meet Jane Goodall once . . . I couldn't have borne it without her. I never should have left England while she lived. If it weren't for Carol — " For several minutes Sally's hand had been moving of its own accord, short rhythmic strokes that ceased abruptly when, becoming aware of this movement, she broke off her sentence and glanced— sharply, in alarm — at me.

I made a terrific effort to control my face and voice, a fisherman angling for the biggest trout in the pool. "She must have been remarkable."

For a wonder Sally didn't get up without a word and stalk away. Instead she said awkwardly, "I — do you mind very much my doing this? I've always done it — for comfort, I suppose — ever since I was small, and it's a bit difficult to talk about all these things . . . without . . ."

From the first day of training, I had determined never to let Sally force a contrast between us; I would adapt to her own sense of fitness out here. If she climbed naked, so would I, tender skin or not. If she urinated openly, and standing, so would I — and without a doubt there was something agreeable about spraddling beside Sally while our waters flowed. A civilized woman can still pass the whole length of her life without ever seeing another woman's urine, or genitalia, or having extended, repeated, and matter-of-fact exposure to another woman's naked body — and yet how many *men*, I had asked myself, ever gave these homely matters a second thought?

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Then why on earth should we?

Certainly no woman had ever before done in my presence what Sally had been doing. Mentally, I squared my shoulders. "Why should I mind? Look, I'll keep you company" — suiting action to words with a sense of leaping in desperation into unknown waters, graceless but absolutely determined — "O.K.?"

It was the very last thing Sally had looked for. For a second I was afraid she thought I was ridiculing her in some incomprehensible way; but she only watched, briefly, before saying, "O.K. For a psychologist you're not a bad sort. The first bloody thing they did at that mission school was make me stop doing this in front of people.

"So anyway. Carol knew I was longing for the wild life, and knew it was important, not trivial or wrong, so she gave it back to me as well as she could. But she couldn't give me back" — her voice cracked as she said this — "the chimpanzees. The people I knew. And I did miss them dreadfully — certain ones, and living in the troop — the thing is, I was a child among them, and in a lot of ways it was a lovely life for a child, out there. The wild chimps are so direct and excitable, their feelings change like lightning, they're perfectly uninhibited — they squabble like schoolkids with no master about. And the babies are so sweet! But its all very — very, you know, physical; and I missed it. I thought I should die with missing it, before Carol came." The grapes were all gone. Sally chucked the stem into the brambles and lay back on the blanket, left arm bent across her eyes, right hand rocking softly.

"Part of my training in London was manners and morals: to control myself, play fair, treat people politely whether I liked them or not. I'd *enjoyed* throwing tantrums and swatting the little ones when they got in my road, and screaming when I was furious and throwing my arms around everybody in reach when I was excited or happy, and being hugged and patted — like this," patting her genitals to demonstrate the chimpanzees' way of reassuring one another, "when I was upset. Chimps have no superego. It's hard to have to form one at thirteen. By then, pure selfishness without guilt is hard to conquer. Oh, I had a lot of selfishness to put up with from the others — I was very low-ranking, of course, being small and female — but I never got seriously hurt. And a knockabout life makes you tough, and then I had the Old Man for a protector as well." Sally lifted her arm and looked beneath it, up at me. "For a kid, most of the time, it was a pretty exhilarating life, and I missed it. And I missed," she said, "getting fucked. They were not providing any of that at University College, London."

"What?" My thumb stopped moving. "Ah — were you old enough? I

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mean, were the males interested, even though you didn't go pink?" I began to rub again, perhaps faster.

"For the last year or thereabouts — I'm not quite sure how long. It must have been, I don't know, pheromones in the mucus, or something in my urine, but I know it was quite soon after my periods started that they'd get interested in me *between* periods, when I would have been fertile, even without the swelling. I knew all about it, naturally; I'd seen plenty of copulating right along, as far back as I could remember. A pink female is a very agitating social element, so I'd needed to watch closely, because one's got to get out of the way, except while they're actually going at it. That's when all the little ones try to make them stop — don't ask me why," she added quickly, then grinned. "Sorry. That's one thing every primatologist has wanted to know." Sally's movements were freer now; watching, I was abruptly pierced by a pang of oddity, which I clamped down on as best I could. This was definitely not the moment for turning squeamish.

"It frightened me badly that first time; adult male chimps who want something don't muck about. When they work themselves up, you know, they're quite dangerous. I usually avoided them, except for the Old Man, who'd sort of adopted me not long after the troop took me in . . . any road the first time hurt, and then of course everybody always wants a piece of the action, and it went on for *days*. By the time it was over, I'd got terribly sore. But later . . . well, after I'd recovered from that first bout, I found it didn't really hurt anymore. In fact, I liked it. Quite a lot, actually once I saw I needn't be frightened The big males are frightfully strong, the only time I could ever dare be so close to so many of them was then, when I came in season, and one or another of them would sort of summon me over to him, and then they'd all queue up and press up behind me, one after another . . "

More relieved than she realized at having broken the long silence at last, Sally went on telling her story; and of course, the more vividly she pictured for me her role in this scene of plausible bizarreness, elaborating, adding details, the more inevitable was the outcome of our own unusual scene. All the same, when the crisis struck us, more or less simultaneously, it left me for the moment speechless and utterly nonplussed, and Sally seemed hardly less flustered than I.

But after that momentary shock, we each glanced sidelong at each other's flushed, flummoxed face and burst into snorts of laughter; and we laughed together — breathlessly, raggedly, probably a little hysterically — for quite a while. And pretty soon it was all right. Everything was fine.

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It was all right, but common sense cautioned that if Sally's defenses were too quickly breached, she would take fright. So many barriers had collapsed at once as to make me grateful for the several days that must elapse before the next coaching session. Still, when I passed her figure in its floppy navy smockdress and dark glasses on campus the following morning, I was struck as never before by the contrast between the public Sally and the powerful glowing creature nobody here had seen but me. A different person in her situation, I thought, would surely have exploited the public's natural curiosity: made movies, written books, gone on the lecture circuit, endorsed products and causes. Instead, to please her teachers, everything that had stubbornly remained Chimp Child in Sally as she learned and grew had had to be concealed, denied.

But because the required denial was a concealment and a lie, she had paid an exhorbitant price for it; too much of what was vital in her had living roots in those eight years of wildness. Sally was genuinely fond of and grateful to the zealous psychologists who had given back her humanity. At the same time she resented them quite as bitterly as she resented a public interested only in the racier parts of her life in the wild and in her humanity not at all. One group starved her, the other shamed her. Resentments and gratitudes had split her life between them. She would never consent to display herself *as* the Chimp Child on any sort of platform, yet without the secret life she would have shriveled to a husk. When I surprised her in the park, she had naturally feared and hated me. Not any more.

Success despite such odds made me ambitious. I conceived a plan. Somehow I would find a way — become a way! — to integrate the halves of Sally's divided self; one day she would walk across this quad, no longer alone, wearing her aspect of the woods (though clothed and cleaner). I'd worked clinically with self-despising homosexuals, and with the children of divorced and poisonously hostile parents; Sally's case, though unique in one way, was common enough in others. Charged with purpose, I watched as the brisk, dark shape entered a distant building and swore a sacred oath to the Principle of Human Potential: I would finish the job, I would dedicate myself to the saving of Sally Barnes. Who but I could save her now? At that fierce moment I knew exactly how Itard had felt when finally, for the first time, he had succeeded in reducing Victor to the fundamental humanity of tears.

Saturday looked threatening, but I set off anyway for the park. The mid-afternoon heat was oppressive; I cut my muscle-loosening jog to a kilometer or two, then quartered through

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the woods to the training oak. Early as I was, Sally had come before me. I couldn't see her, high in the now dense foliage, but her clothing was piled in the usual place and I guessed she had made a day-nest at the top of that tree or one nearby, or was traveling about up there somewhere. After a long drink from the canteen I peeled off my own sweaty shorts, toweling shirt, shoes, and the running bra of heavy spandex, smeared myself with insect repellent, and dried my hands on my shirt. Then I crouched slightly, caught a heavy limb well over two meters above the ground and pulled myself into the tree.

For ten minutes I ran through a set of upper-body warmups with care and concentration; I'd pulled one muscle in my shoulder four times and once another in my back, before finding an old book on gymnastics explaining how to prevent (and treat) such injuries. The first few weeks I had worn lightweight Keds, and been otherwise generally scraped and skinned. But now my skin had toughened — I hadn't known it would do that — and greater strength made it easier to forgo the clambering friction of calves and forearms; now, for the most part, my hands and feet were all that came in contact with the bark. A haircut had nicely solved the problems of snarling twigs and obscured vision.

Warm and loose, I quickly climbed ten meters higher and began another series of strengthening and balancing exercises, swinging back and forth, hand over hand, along several slender horizontal limbs, standing and walking over a heavier one, keeping myself relaxed.

After half an hour of this, I descended to the massive lowest limb and practiced dropping to the ground, absorbing the shock elastically with both hands and both feet, chimp-style. Again and again I sprang into the tree, poised, and landed on the ground. I was doing quite well, but on about the fifteenth drop I bruised my hand on a rock beneath the leaf mold and decided to call it an afternoon; my hair was plastered flat with sweat, and I was as drenched as if I'd just stepped out of a shower. I had a long, tepid drink and was swabbing myself down with my shirt when Sally left the tree by the same limb, landed with a negligent, perfect pounce, came forward and — without meeting my eye — relieved me of the canteen, at the same time laying her free arm briefly across my shoulders. "That one's looking pretty good," she said, nodding at the branch to indicate my Dropping-to-the-Ground exercise. The arm slid off, she picked up the squirter of Tropikbug — "but did you ever see such monstrous mosquitoes in your life?"

"It's the humidity, I was afraid the storm would break before I could get through the drill. Maybe we better skip the rest and try to beat it home."

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Sally squirted some repellent into her palm and wiped it up and down her limbs and over her brown abdomen. She squirted out some more. "Yours is all sweated off," she said, still not meeting my eye; and instantly Hugo Van Lawick's photographs of chimps soliciting grooming flashed into my mind, and I turned my shoulder toward Sally, who rubbed the bug stuff into it, then anointed the other shoulder, and my back and breasts and stomach for good measure, and then handed the flask dreamily to me, presenting her own back to be smeared with smelly goop. At that instant the first dramatic thunderclap banged above the park, making us both jump; and for a heart-stopping second Sally's outstretched arm clutched round me.

We bundled the blanket back into its plastic pouch and cached it, and pulled on clothes, while rain began to fall in torrents. My jogging shoes were clearly goners. I didn't bother to put on the bra, rolling it up on the run and sticking it inside my waistband. We floundered out of the trees in a furious commotion of wind and crackle-WHAM of lightning, and dashed in opposite directions for our parked cars. It took me fully fifteen minutes to reach mine, and twenty more to pedal home by roads several centimeters deep in rain, with the heater going full blast, and another half hour to take a hot shower and brew some tea. Then, wrapped in a bathrobe, I carried the tea tray and Jane Goodall's classic study *In the Shadow of Man* into the living room, and reread for the dozenth time the passages on the social importance of physical contact among wild chimpanzees.

Over and over, as I sat there, I relived the instant of Sally's instinctive quasi embrace in the storm, and each time it stopped my breath. What must Sally herself be feeling then? What terrifying conflict of needs? She must realize, just as I did, that a torrent had begun to build that would sweep her carefully constructed defenses away, that she could not stop it now, that she must flee or be changed by what would follow.

When I thought of *change*, it was as something about to happen to Sally, though change was moving just as inexorably down upon me. Three or four times in my life, I've experienced that sense of *courting* change, of choosing my life from moment to moment, the awareness of process and passage that exalted me that evening but never before or since with such intensity. I alone had brought us to this, slowly, over months of time, as the delicate canoe is portaged and paddled to where the white water begins. Day by day we had picked up speed; now the stream was hurtling us forward together; now, with all our skill and nerve and strength, we would ride the current — we would shoot through. There is a word for this vivid awareness: existential.

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If I feared then, it was that Sally might hurl herself out of the canoe.

The next day but one was not a regular coaching day, but the pitch of nervous excitement made desk work impossible. I drove to the park in mid-afternoon to jog, and afterward decided, in preference to more disciplined routines, to practice my Traveling-from-Tree-to-Tree. My speed and style at this — that of a very elderly, very arthritic ape — was still not half bad (I thought) for a human female pushing forty, though proper brachiation still lay well beyond my powers. The run, as usual, had settled me down. The creek, still aboil with muddy runoff from the storm, was racketing along through a breezy, beautiful day. I chose an ash with a low fork, stuffed my clothes into my fanny pack, buckled it on, and started to climb.

I hadn't expected to find Sally at the training tree, but saw her without surprise — seated below me, cross-legged on the grubby blanket — when, an hour later, I had made my way that far. She stood up slowly while I descended the familiar pattern of limbs and dropped from the bottommost one. Again without surprise I saw that she looked awful, shaky and sick, that assurance had deserted her — and understood then that *whatever* happened now would not surprise me, that I was ready and would be equal to it. While I stood before Sally, breathing hard, unfastening the buckle, . the world arranged itself into a patterned whole.

Then, as I let the pack fall, Sally crouched low on the blanket, whimpering and twisting with distress. I knelt at once and gathered her into my arms, holding her firmly, all of her skin close against all of mine. She clutched at me, pressed her face into my neck. Baffled moaning sounds and sobs came out of her. She moved inside this embrace; still moaning, eyes squeezed shut, her blind face searched until she had taken the nipple and end of my left breast into her mouth. As she sucked and mouthed at this, with her whole face pushed into the breast, her body gradually unknotted, relaxed, curled about mine, so I could loosen my hold to stroke her with the hand not suporting her head. Soon, to relieve the strain of the position, I pressed the fanny pack — I could just reach it — into service as a pillow and lay down on my side, still cradling Sally's head.

Time passed, or stopped. The nipple began to be sore.

At last, seemingly drained, she rolled away onto her back. Her face was smeared with mucus and tears; I worked my shirt out of the pack one-handed and dried it. At once she rolled back again, pushing herself against me with a long, groaning sigh. "The past couple of nights, God, I've had all sorts of dreams. Not bad dreams, not exactly, but — there was this old female in the troop, maybe

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her baby died, it must have done. . . I'd completely forgotten this. This must have been when they first found me. *She* found me, I think . . . I think I'd been alone in the forest without food long enough to be utterly petrified and apathetic with terror. But when she found me . . . I remember she held me against her chest and shoved the nipple in — maybe just to relieve her discomfort, or to replace her own child with a substitute, who knows. I think I would certainly have died except for that milk, there was such all-encompassing fear and misery. I don't know how many weeks or months she let me nurse. She couldn't have lived very long, though."

Sally weighed my breast in her hand. "Last night I dreamed I was in some terrible place, so frightened I couldn't move or open my eyes, and somebody . . . picked me up and held me, and then I was suckling milk from a sort of teat, and felt, oh, ever so much better, a great flood of relief. Then I opened my eyes and saw we were in the bush — I recognized the actual place — but it was *you,* the person holding me was you! You had a flat chest with big rubbery chimpanzee nipples" — lifting the tender breast on her palm — "and a sort of chimp face, but you were only skin all over, and I realized it was you."

I put my hand firmly over hers, moved it down along her forearm. "How did you feel when you knew it was me?"

"Uncomfortable. Confused. Angry." Then reluctantly: "Happy, too. I woke up, though, and then mostly felt just astonished to remember that that old wet nurse had saved my life and I'd not given her a single thought for twenty-five years." She lay quiet under my caressing: neck, breasts, stomach, flank; her eyes closed again. "What's queer is that I should remember *now,* but not when Carol first took charge of me, and not when I first read *Tarzan*, even though the Tarzan story's nearly the same as mine. I don't understand why now and not then."

"Do you feel you need to? I mean, does it seem important to understand?"

"I don't know." She sounded exhausted. "I certainly don't feel like even trying to sort it all out now."

"Well. It'll probably sort itself out soon enough, provided you don't start avoiding whatever makes these disturbing memories come back."

Sally opened her eyes and smiled thinly. "Start avoiding you, you mean. No. I shan't, never fear." She snuggled closer, widening and tilting herself; in my "therapist" frame of mind, I tried to resist this, but my hand — stroking on automatic for so long — slid downward at once on its own, and I ceased at the same instant to ignore a response I'd been blocking without realizing it for a good long while. I was still lying on my side, facing Sally; my top knee shifted without permission, and seconds later another

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afternoon had culminated in a POW that made my ears ring.

I was destined to know very well indeed the complicated space between Sally's muscular thighs, far better than I would ever know the complicated space inside her head, but that first swift unforeseen climax had a power I still recall with astonishment. My sex life, though quite varied, had all been passed in the company of men. I'd never objected to homosexuality in any of its forms, on principle and by professional conviction, but before that day no occasion of proving this personally had happened to occur. As for Sally, her isolation had allowed for no sex life at all with humans male *or* female; and though the things we did together meant, if possible, even more to her than they did to me, she didn't really view them in a sexual light. To Sally's way of thinking, *sex* was a thing that happened more or less constantly during several days each month, and had to do with dark, shaggy, undeniable maleness forcing itself upon you — with brief, rough gusto — from behind. She continued to miss this fear-laced excitement just as before. Our physical involvement, which was regularly reinforced, and which often ended as it had that afternoon, was a source of immeasurable pleasure and solace to her, but she viewed it as the natural end of a process that had more to do with social grooming than with sex.

But for me it was a revelation, and late in August, when the coarse, caterpillar-chewed foliage hung dispiritedly day after day in the torpid air, I went away for a week to remind myself of what ordinary sex was like with an ordinary man. Afterward I returned to Sally having arrived at a more accurate view of the contrast: not as pudendum versus penis, but as the mythic versus the mundane. Sleeping with my comfy old flame had been enjoyable as ever, but he was no wild thing living a split life and sharing the secret half with me alone. "Are you in love with somebody?" Bill asked me on our last evening together.

"Is that what's up with you? It's got to have something to do with your being in this incredible physical shape — wait! don't tell me! you've conceived a fatal passion for a jock!" I laughed and promised to let him in on the secret when I could, and though his eyes were sharp with curiosity, he didn't press the point. And for that, when the time came, Bill was one of half a dozen friends I finally did tell about Sally.

But even then, after it could no longer matter materially, I was unable to answer his question. Was I in love with Sally, or she with me? No. Or yes. For more than a year, I worked hard to link her with the human community, she to school me for a role in a childhood fantasy of irresistible (and doubtless neurotic) appeal.

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Each of us was surely fated to love what the other symbolized; how could we help it? But I've wondered since whether I was ever able to see Sally as anything but the Chimp Child, first and last. For each of us, you see, there was only *one*. In such a case, how can individual be told from type, how can the love be personal? And when not personal, what does "love" mean, anyway?

Whatever it was or meant, it absorbed us, and I was as happy that summer as ever in my life. As the season waned and the fall semester began, my skills and plans both moved forward obedient to my will. After workouts we would spread the blanket on its plastic ground sheet and ourselves across the blanket, giving our senses up to luxuriant pleasure. While the yellow leaves tapped down about us all but inaudibly.

And afterward we'd talk. It was at this stage that bit by bit I was able to breach Sally's quarantine by turning the talk to our work: her research, my theoretical interests, gifted or maddening students, departmental politics, university policy. Even then, when I encountered Sally on campus, her indifference toward me as toward everyone appeared unchanged; and at first these topics annoyed and bored her. But bit by bit I could see her begin to take an interest in the personalities we worked among, form judgments about them, distinguish among her students. To my intense delight, colorful chimp personalities began to swim up from her memory, with anecdotes to illustrate them, and she spoke often of Carol Cheswick, and — less frequently — of the team of psychologists at University College.

Cambridge provided no material of this sort, for by the time the church fellowship had sent her up, Cheswick was dead and Sally left to devise ways of coping on her own with the nosy public while protecting her privacy and the purposes it served. Antisocial behavior had proved an effective means to that end at Cambridge, as it was to do subsequently at our own university. She had concentrated fiercely on her studies. In subjects that required an intuitive understanding of people — literature, history, the social sciences — her schoolwork had always been lackluster; in mathematics and hard science, she had excelled from the first. At Cambridge she read biology. Microbiology genuinely fascinated her; now, thus late in her career, Sally was discovering the pleasures of explaining an ongoing experiment to a listener only just able to follow. In fact, she was discovering gossip and shop talk.

By the time cold temperatures and bare trees had forced me to join a fitness center and Sally to work out alone in a thermal skinsuit and thin pigskin gloves and moccasins, she was able to say: "I remember that old mother chimpanzee because she saved

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me out of a killing despair, and so did you. So did you, Jan. That day you discovered me crying in the beech, remember? I actually believed I was coping rather well then, but the truth is I was dying. I might really have died, I think — like a houseplant, slowly, of heat and dryness and depleted soil." And to me as well, this seemed no more than the simple truth.

That winter, one measure of our progress was that I could sometimes coax Sally to my house. Had close friends of mine been living nearby, or friendly neighbors or relatives, this could not have been possible; as it was she would leave her pedalcar several blocks away and walk to the house by varying routes, and nearly always after dark. But once inside, with doors locked and curtains drawn, we could be easy, eat and read, light a fire to sit before, snuggle in bed together. In winter, outdoor sex was impractical and we could never feel entirely safe from observation in the denuded woods, whose riding trails wound through and through it. And Sally's obsessive concealment of the fact that she had made a friend, and that her privacy could therefore be trespassed upon, seemed to weaken very little despite the radical changes she had passed through.

Truly, I found myself in no hurry to weaken it. I could not expect, nor did I wish, to have Sally to myself forever. Indeed my success would be measured by how much more fully she could learn to function in society — develop other friendships and activities and so on — eventually. It is true that I could not quite picture this, though I went on working toward it in perfect confidence that the day would come. Yet for the time being, like a mother who watches her child grow tall with mingled pride and sorrow, I kept our secret willingly and thought *eventually* would be here soon enough.

As spring drew closer, Sally began sleeping badly and to be troubled again by dreams. She grew oddly moody also. All through the winter she had dressed and slipped out to her car in the dark; now I would sometimes wake in the morning to find her still beside me. Several times her mutterings and thrashings disturbed me in the night, and then I would soothe and hold her till we both dozed off again. That a crisis was brewing looked certain, but though the dreams continued for weeks, she soon stopped telling me anything about them and said little else to reveal the nature of her distress. In fact, I believed I knew what the trouble was. The first dreams, those she had described, were all about Africa and England and seemed drenched in yearning for things unutterably dear, lost beyond recall. They seemed dreams of mourning — for her parents, her

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lost wild life in Tanzania, her teacher. Events of the past year, I thought, had rendered the old defenses useless. She could not escape this confrontation any longer.

I was very glad. Beyond the ordeal of grief lay every possibility for synthesizing the halves of her life into one coherent human whole. I believed that Cheswick's death in Sally's twenty-third year had threatened to touch off a mourning for all these losses at once, and that to avoid this she had metamorphosed into the Cambridge undergraduate of my scrapbook: intellectual, unsociable, dull. "You're a survivor," I had told her one night that winter, and she had replied, "Up to a point." Now it seemed she felt strong enough at last to do the grieving and survive *that*, and break through to a more complete sort of health and strength.

Either that, or the year's developments had weakened her ability to compensate, and she would now be swiftly destroyed by the forces held so long in check; but I thought not.

Weeks passed while Sally brooded and sulked; our partnership, so long a source of happy relief, had acquired ambiguities she found barely tolerable. Once she did avoid me for nine days despite her promise — only to turn up, in a state of feverish lust, for a session as unlike our lazy summertime trysts as possible. Afterward she was heavy and silent, then abruptly tearful. I bore with all this patiently enough, chiefly by trying to foresee what might happen next and what it might mean, and so was not much surprised when she said finally, "I've decided not to teach this summer after all. I want to go to England for a month or so, after I've got the experiment written up."

I nodded, thinking, *Here it is.* Huge green skunk cabbages were thick now in the low places on the floor of the April woods, and fly fisherfolk thick along and in the creek; once again we had the mild, bare, windy, hairy-looking forest to ourselves, and were perched together high in a white-topped sycamore hung with balls. "Sounds like a good plan, though I'll miss you. Where to, exactly, or have you decided yet?"

"Well — London for a start, and Cambridge, and here and there. I might just pop in on my sister, not that there's much point to *that*." Sally's sister Helen had married the vicar of a large church in Liverpool and produced four children. "But about missing me. You like England, you're always telling me. Why not come along?"

"Really?" I hadn't foreseen everything, it seemed. "Of course I'll come, I'd love to. Or no, wait a minute" — squirming round on the smooth limb to watch her face — "have you thought this through? I mean, suppose the papers get wind of it? 'Chimp Child Returns to Foster Country.' Or even: 'Chimp Child, Friend, Visit England.'

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If we're traveling together, people are bound to *see* us together — sure you want to risk it?"

"Oh well, so what," said the Chimp Child, for all the world as if she hadn't been creeping up to my house under cover of night all winter long. "I want to talk to the blokes at the university, Snyder and Brill and a couple of others — get them to show me the files on *me*." She swung free of the branch and dangled by one hand to hug me with the opposite arm. "Sorry I've been such a bore lately. There's something I'm suddenly madly curious about, I've had the most appalling dreams, night after night, for weeks." She swung higher in the tree, climbing swiftly by her powerful arms alone, flashing across gaps as she worked her way to the high outermost branches and leapt outward and downward into another tree with the action I loved to see. "Right," she called back across the gulf between us, "get to work then, you lazy swine. We'll put on a show for Helen's kids that'll stop traffic all over the ruddy parish."

And so we flew to England; and now my part of the story is nearly finished.

Sally did not quite feel ready to come out, as it were, to the extent of going anywhere in my company at school, though she'd smile now with some naturalness when our paths would cross there, and even exchange a few words in passing. We arrived separately at the airport. But from that point on, we were indeed "traveling together," and she never tried to make it seem otherwise.

She had wanted a couple of days in Cambridge before tackling the records of her unique education, as if to work backward in time by bearable degrees, and so it was together that we climbed the wide stairs on a Tuesday afternoon early in June to look into her first-year room in Newnham College. Unfortunately the present occupant knew the Chimp Child had once been quartered in her room and recognized Sally immediately; she must have felt perplexed and dismayed at the grimness of the famous pilgrim, who glared round without comment, refused a cup of tea, and stalked away leaving me to render thanks/apologies on behalf of us both. I caught Sally on the stairs. Nothing was said till we had proceeded the length of two green courts bordered with flower beds and come out into the road. Then: "God, I was wretched here!" she burst out. "I went through the whole three years in a — in a chromatic daze, half unconscious except in the lab, and going through that door again — it was as if all the color and warmth began to drain out of a hole in the floor of the day, and I could only stand helplessly watching. The very *smell* of the place means nothing but death to me. What bloody, bloody waste."

And "What a waste," more thought-

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fully the next morning, as we walked back to the station from our bed-and-breakfast across the river and the common with its grazing Friesians and through the Botanical Gardens. "One sees why other people could manage to be so jolly and smug here, while I'd go skulking down to Grantchester at five in the morning to work out in the only wood for miles, terrified every day I should be caught out, and skulking back to breakfast every day relieved, like an exhibitionist who thinks, 'Well, there's one more time I got away with it.'" A few minutes later she added, "Of course it got much better when I was working on my thesis . . . only those years don't seem real at *all* when I try to remember them. All I can remember is the lab, I expect that's why."

"Why it got better, or why it's unreal?"

"Both, very likely."

She was pensive on the train. I fell asleep and woke as we were pulling into Liverpool Street, feeling tired and headachy, the beginnings of the flu that put me to bed for a crucial week when I might otherwise have done something, just be staying well, to affect the course of events. By late afternoon of that Wednesday, I felt too miserable to be embarrassed at imposing myself on Dr. Snyder's wife and filling their tiny guest room with my awkward germiness. For four or five days, I had a dry, wheezy cough and a fever so high that Mrs. Snyder was beginning to talk rather worriedly of doctors; then the fever broke and my head, though the size of a basketball, no longer burned, and I rallied enough to take in that Sally was gone.

She had spent the early days of my illness at University College, reading, asking occasional questions, searching — as it seemed — for something she couldn't describe but expected to recognize when she found it. Late on the fourth day, the day my temperature was highest, she came in and sat on the bed. "Listen, Jan. I'm off to Africa tomorrow."

I swam wearily to the surface. "Africa? But . . . don't you have to get, uh, inoculations or something? Visas?" I didn't wonder, within the remoteness of my fever, why she was going. Nor did I much care that evidently she would be going without me.

"Only cholera and yellow fever, and I've had them. Before we left, just in case; and yesterday afternoon I bagged the last seat on a tourist charter to Dar es Salaam. The flight returns in a fortnight, by which time you should be fit again, and we can go on up north then or wherever you like." When I didn't reply, she added, unnecessarily, "I've got to visit the school, Malosa School, and sort of stare the forest in the face again. It's terribly important, though I can't say just why. Maybe when I've got back, when you're better. Only, I've made my mind up to take this chance while

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it's going, because I do feel I've absolutely got to go through with it, as quick as I can."

My eyes ached. I closed them, shutting out the floating silhouette of Sally's head and shoulders. "I know. I wish . . ."

"Never mind. It'll be all right. Sorry I didn't tell you before, but first I wanted to make sure." I felt her hand beneath my pajama jacket. "God, you're *hot*," she said, surprised. "Perhaps I ought to leave it till you're a bit better."

Distantly amused at this display of superego, I said, "You know a fever's always highest at night, old virologist. Anyway, you can't do any good here. We'll have a doctor in soon if it doesn't go down." I made a truly tremendous effort. "It's probably a good idea, Sally, the trip. I hope you can find whatever it is you're looking for." Clumsily I patted the hand inside my pajamas. "But don't miss the plane coming back, I'll be dying to hear what happened."

"I shan't, I promise you," she said with relief; and when I woke the next morning, she had gone.

We know that Sally reached Dar es Salaam after an uneventful flight, spent the night in an airport hotel, flew Air Malawi to the Chileka airfield the next morning, and hired a driver to take her the 125 kilometers overland to Machinga and the Malosa Secondary School, where she was greeted with pleased astonishment by those of the staff who remembered her — everyone, of course, knew of her connection with the school. She stayed there nearly a week, questioning people about the details of her early childhood and of exactly what had happened when the church officials brought her in, in the weeks before she had been whisked to London. She spent hours prowling about the grounds and buildings, essentially the same as thirty years before despite some modest construction and borrowed the school's Land-Rover several times to drive alone into the countryside of the Shire Highlands and the valley beyond. Her manner had been alternately brusque and preoccupied, and she had impressed them all as being under considerable strain.

The school staff confirmed that Sally had been driven back to Chileka by a couple, old friends of her parents, who at her request had dropped her at the terminal without coming in to see her off. She had told them she intended to fly back to Dar that evening in order to catch her charter for London the next day, and that she hated a dragged-out good-bye; the couple had no way of knowing that her ticket had specified a two-week stay abroad. Inside the terminal she bought a round-trip ticket for Ujiji, in Tanzania.

From Ujiji a helicopter shuttle took her to Kogoma on Lake Tanganyika. Once there, Sally had made inquiries,

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then gone straight to the town's tiny branch of Bookers Ltd., a safari agency operating out of a closet-sized cubbyhole in the VW dealership. She told the Bookers agent — a grizzled old Indian — that she wanted to hire two men to help her locate the place where a plane had crashed in the mountains east of the lake, some thirty years before. She produced detailed directions and maps; and the agent, though openly doubtful whether the wreckage would not have rusted into the ground after so long, agreed for a stiff price to outfit and provision the trip. He assigned his cousin to guide her, and a native porter. Forty-eight hours later this small expedition set off into the mountains in the agency's battered four-wheel-drive safari van.

The cousin had parked the van beside the road of ruts that had brought them as far as roads could bring them toward the area marked on Sally's maps, much nearer than any road had approached it on the day of the crash, but still not near. They had then followed a footpath into the forest for several kilometers before beginning to slash a trail away from it to the westward, toward the site where the plane had gone down. Something like fifty kilometers of rainforested mountainous terrain had to be negotiated on foot, a difficult, unpleasant, suffocating sort of passage. Sally must have been assailed by frustration at the clumsiness of their progress; the guide called her a bad-tempered bitch, probably for good reason. On the third morning her patience had evidently snapped. When the men woke up, Sally was not in camp. They waited, then shouted, then searched, but she never replied or reappeared. And I knew what they could not: that she must have slipped away and taken to the trees, flying toward a goal now less than fifteen kilometers distant.

I had gone out to meet Sally's plane, due into Gatwick on the same day the reporters got hold of the story of her disappearance. When she proved not to be aboard, and to have sent no word, all my uneasiness broke out like sweat, and back in the city I must have hurried past any number of newsstands before the *Guardian* headline snatched at my attention: WILD WOMAN MISSING IN JUNGLE, SEARCH CONTINUES. I bought a paper and stood shaking on the pavement to read: "Dodoma (Tanzania), Tuesday. Sally Barnes, the wild girl brought up by chimpanzees, has been missing in the mountains of Tanzania since Friday . . . two companions state . . .no trace of the Chimp Child . . . police notified and a search party . . ." and finally: "Searchers report sighting several groups of wild chimpanzees in the bush near the point of her disappearance."

All the rest is a matter of record. Day by day the newspapers repeated it: No trace, No trace, and at last, Presumed dead. The guide and porter

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were questioned but never tried for murder. In print and on the video news, it was noted that Dr. Barnes had vanished into the jungle only a few kilometers east of the spot where she had emerged from it twenty years earlier. Investigators quickly discovered that Sally and I had been together in Cambridge and London, and I, too, was forced to submit to questioning; I told them we had met on the plane and spent a few days as casual traveling companions, and that when I fell ill, her friends had kindly taken me in. I denied any closer connection between us, despite my having studied her case professionally — mentioning that she was well known at the university for her solitary ways. Sally herself had said nothing in particular to the Snyders about us, and I had been too sick. No one was alive in all the world to contradict the essential factors of this story, and, as it appeared to lead nowhere, they soon let me alone. (Some years later, however, I told Dr. Snyder the whole truth.)

It developed that no one had any idea why Sally had gone to Tanzania, why she was looking for the site of the plane crash.

For me that fall was hellish. By the time I returned to the States, only a few days before the new semester was to get under way, Sally's apartment — the apartment I had never seen, though she had called me from it two or three times during the final weeks of spring — had been stripped of its contents by strangers and her effects shipped to the Liverpool sister. At school, people were overheard to suggest, only half jokingly, that Sally had rejoined the chimps and was living now in the jungle, wild again. Such things were freely voiced in my presence; indeed, the loss of Sally, so shocking, so complete, was the more difficult to accept because not a single person on my side of the Atlantic could have the least suspicion that I had lost her.

My acting, I believe, was flawless. Though I went dazedly about my work, nobody seemed to see anything amiss. But might-have-beens tormented me. Save for my interference, Sally would almost certainly still have been alive. Or (more excruciating by far), had she not met defeat in the jungle, her search would almost certainly have left her healed of trauma, able to fit the halves of her life together. I had nearly freed her; now she was dead, the labor come to nothing, the child stillborn. I did believe she was dead. Yet I felt as angry with her, at times, as if she had purposely abandoned and betrayed me, disdained the miracle of healing I had nearly brought off — as if she had really chosen to return to the wild. For now neither of us could ever, ever complete the crossing into those worlds each had been training the other to enter for the preceding year.

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I did not see how I was going to survive the disappointment, nor could I imagine what could possibly occupy, or justify, the rest of my life. The interlude with Sally had spoiled me thoroughly for journeyman work. It would not be enough, any longer, to divide my time between educating healthy minds and counseling disturbed ones. Long before that bleak winter was out, I had begun to cast about fretfully for something else to do.

This document has been prepared in snatches, over many evenings, by kerosene lanternlight in my tent in the Matangawe River Nature Reserve overlooking Lake Malawi, 750 kilometers northwest across the immense lake from Sally's birthplace. The tent is set up inside a chimp-proof cage made of Cyclone fencing and corrugated iron. Outside, eleven chimpanzees of assorted ages and stages of reacclimatization to independent survival in the wild are sleeping (all but the newest arrival, who is crying to get in). A few of these chimps were captured as infants in the wild; the rest are former subjects of language and other learning experiments, ex-laboratory animals or animals who were reared in homes until they began to grow unmanageable.

This may seem an unlikely place in which to attempt the establishment of a free-living population of rehabilitant chimpanzees, for the ape has been extinct in Malawi for a couple of centuries at least, and the human population pressure is terrific, the highest in Africa. In fact, to "stare the forest in the face," Sally was forced to go on back to Tanzania, where there was (and still is) some riverine forest left standing. Yet private funding materialized, and I've been here since the reserve was created, nearly fifteen years. Despite some setbacks and failures — well, there were bound to be some! — the project is doing very well indeed. At this writing, thirty-four chimps have mastered the course of essential survival skills and moved off to establish breeding, thriving communities on their own in the reserve. For obvious reasons these societies fascinate the primatologists, who often come to study them. We've lost a few to disease and accidents, and two to poachers, but our success, considering the problems inherent to the enterprise, might even be called spectacular. We've been written up in *National Geographic* and the *Smithsonian*, which in primate studies is how you know when you've arrived, and similar projects in several more suitable West African countries have been modeled on ours.

I started alone, with three adolescent chimpanzee "graduates in psychology" from my university who, having outgrown their usefulness along with their tractable childhoods, faced long, dull lives in zoos or immediate euthanasia. Now a staff of

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eight works with me: my husband, John (yes, the same John), and seven graduate students from my old department and from the Department of Biology, which used to be Sally's. She would be pleased with my progress in brachiation, though arthritis in my hands and shoulders has begun to moderate my treetop traveling with my charges. (That skill, incidentally, has given me a tactical edge over every other pioneer in the field of primate rehabilitation.)

To all the foregoing I will add only that I have found this work more satisfying than I can say. And that very often as I'm swinging along through lush forest in the company of four or five young chimps, "feeding" with them on new leaves and baobab flowers, showing them how to build a sturdy nest in the branches, I know a deep satisfaction that now, at last, there's no difference that matters between Sally and me.

"Hot ziggidy! I was afraid nostalgia had run its course!"

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In addition to science fiction, James Sallis has published extensively in the areas of poetry, music and criticism. Currently, he is working on a collection of short stories, a translation of Raymond Queneau's novel-in-verse, Chêne et chien, *and a book of essays to be titled* American Solitude. *In his science fiction he is known for the absurdist quality of his writings; "Potato Tree" is a delightful example of this.*

Potato Tree

BY
JAMES SALLIS

"We've found the problem," Dr. Morgan told me.

After a moment I said, "Yes?"

"Basically," he said, "you're crazy as batshit."

He was right, of course, but at ninety dollars an hour I had expected more. I waited. That seemed to be it.

"I see. Well. Is there anything you can do?"

"Oh, yes, a number of things. There are several quite interesting drugs on the market. Years of psychiatry — that might be fun. Shock, megavitamin therapy, behavioral training. Probably a lot of others. I'd have to look it all up."

He swiveled his chair to watch a traffic helicopter swing by outside the window. From his new position he said, "Of course, none of them will help any. You're crazy as batshit, and basically you're just going to have to live with it, accept it. Here, I wrote it down for you."

He swiveled back and handed me an index card upon which was printed in large block letters: C A B S. Below, in a painstaking tiny script, were an asterisk and the words "crazy as batshit."

"It shouldn't really be any great bother. I mean, you'll be able to keep on going to dentists, reading cereal boxes, having regular bowel movements, humming old songs — all the important stuff. Just a little bit of an interpretative dysfunction, that's all. You just won't ever know if things are as they seem to you; they could be *quite* different."

He wet a finger and wiped at a smudge on the desktop.

"I, for instance, could well be a wigmaker. A canoeist. We may at this moment be the sole attendants of a

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missile silo in Kansas. Do you play bridge?"

"No."

"Good. Hate that damned game."

He swiveled again to look out the window.

"Is there anything else you can tell me?" I said after a while. "Any advice, recommendations?"

"Only this," he said. "Go with it, ride it. Enjoy it." He turned back to me. "Most of us live in a much duller world than yours, you know." There was something very like envy in the poor man's voice.

"Thank you, Doctor," I said, rising from my chair and looking for the last time at his wall of diplomas. "You've been a great help."

"It's nothing." He removed his glasses, breathed against them, fumbled in pockets for a handkerchief. "Give me a call now and again to let me know how you're getting along." He looked back at the smudge through clean glasses.

"I'll do that."

I walked a few steps to the door. There was no knob, only a hand protruding from the wood that clasped my own in a handshake. I pulled against it, opening the door.

"Don't forget your diagnosis," the doctor said behind me. I turned. The index card dropped to the floor and scuttled toward me.

The world looked not at all different, unchanged by my illness as it had been by my former health; in short, uncaring. The first elevator was full — all of them wearing the doctor's face, perhaps patients of his — and I waited. Eventually I made it down to the plaza and sat on one of the benches under a potato tree. Some of the hospital patients were having a wheelchair race on the grounds, pursued by grim-faced, limping nurses.

"May I join you for just a moment?"

I looked up into a face of great and radiant beauty, though pale. She collapsed onto the bench beside me.

"Are you all right?"

"Fine. Just give me a moment, I'll be O.K. Please."

I spent the moment looking at the oxblood gleam of her boots, at the tug and thrust of sweater, into the depths of her gray eyes. Never had I felt more alone; my loneliness entered me like a bullet.

"Well. I proved they were wrong, at least," she said.

"I'm sorry?"

"The doctors.... Listen, forgive me. I don't want to inflict you with my troubles. You must have plenty of your own."

"Not really. I'm crazy, you see: nothing can touch me."

I took out the index card and showed it to her. A potato fell to the ground at our feet. The index card leapt onto it and began to feed.

"How wonderful, to have an *interesting* disease. All *I* have's cancer."

"What kind?"

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"The worst kind, of course, but it's still pretty dull."

I put out my hand, and she held it, just as the door had earlier. We sat together looking out over the grounds as a light snow began to fall. Beside us the potato tree thrust into the sky as though *it* were a hand intent on tearing out that white down, intent upon opening it. The patients had turned on their nurses and were chasing them about the grounds, laughing joyously as they crunched bones with the wheelchairs. Children sat watching.

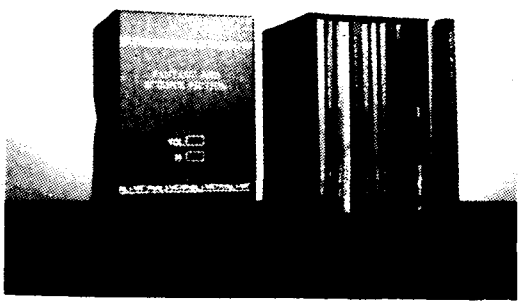
"How long do you have?" I said finally.

"Not long. They said I wouldn't even get out of the building, it was so bad."

"*How* long?"

She looked at her watch.

"Ten minutes," she said, floating into my arms.



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John Barnes writes that he is 28, married, and MFA candidate in writing at the University of Montana. He has had stories in CoEvolution Quarterly *and* Amazing, *and here offers an entertaining tale about ghosts and sexual rivalry.*

How Cold She Is, and Dumb

BY
JOHN BARNES

There was a knock at the door, which meant some imbecile who couldn't read the "Door out of order, please ring" sign. Probably the deliveryman with the stuff from WQDF, though it was rare that anything like that came on Saturday.

The guy on the other side of the peephole was big and brawny, with straight, messy blond hair down to his collar. He was wearing a battered old high school varsity jacket, jeans, sneakers, and a baseball shirt with a spaghetti sauce stain on it. "Hello?" he said loudly.

"Hi." I had a flicker of worry —my voice had told him that I'm a woman. "Are you about the room?"

"Yeah."

"Are you a student at Longfellow?"

"Yes, I am." He shifted nervously.

"What department? Who's chairman?"

"Psych, I'm a grad student. Dr. Junker. And," he added, pulling his jacket around in front of his face, "I have a message from the Fat Man. The rose and the sword have returned—"

"All right," I said, unlocking the door. "I'm paranoid. You would be, too, living alone around here. Come in and see the place. It's a mess, as usual, so you can get an honest picture of what kind of roommate I'd be."

He nodded and came slowly in, looking around the little living-dining room. "I'm Dennis Gerard. Are you the K. Kersakoff that hung up the signs on campus?"

"Kim. Not Kimberly, just Kim — I think my parents hadn't really mastered spelling at the time I was born. The kitchen's back this way — and it's a sty as usual."

"About like I keep it," he said.

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"Not too many dirty dishes, looks like you hit the floor with a broom now and then. Could I see the room?"

"Right this way." I led him to the back bedroom. There wasn't much to see — a bare wood floor, a radiator, and a couple of windows — so he just strolled around, checking the ceiling for water damage.

"O.K.," he said. "Physically, I could live here. Do you want to talk a little, see if we could get along?"

I nodded. "I could use the break from work. I've got beer in the fridge — why don't we sit down and talk?"

I deliberately swung close to him as I went through the door, and he passed the test — he leaned back and away. Guys that are obsessed with women always creep in closer on you. My best friend Cindy says that's why they're called creeps.

Not that I expect to drive anybody wild or anything — my glasses are pretty thick, my T-shirts hang like loose curtains, and I'm still saving for some minor orthodontic work — but there are a lot of guys out there looking to fall in love, object unspecified. I prefer to make sure they don't have the extra in of living with me.

"As you can see," I said, opening the refrigerator door, "I eat a lot of instant plastic everything. Somewhere up in that freezer, there's a huge stack of TV dinners."

"No problem. I've been known to cook real food, but I don't consider it a missionary calling."

I was beginning to think that I was in luck. I tossed him a beer. He fumbled it a little.

"O.K., Dennis," I said, "first me. One, I write for a living, and I do all my business from here, so the phone in my room has to be mine, at least during the day. You'll have to get your own." He nodded. "Two, the reason I want a large male roommate is because I was attacked about two blocks from here a couple of years ago — a real bad thing that ***I don't want to talk about.*** I spent quite a while in a hospital, and my father's big gift to me is that he pays for me to have long chats with Dr. Corbin twice a week. If there's not somebody around, after a few days I get nightmares and have trouble sleeping —so if you start sleeping over at a girlfriend's a lot, I'll need to get a new roommate. Nothing personal or moral, just that having somebody around the place besides me is the whole idea of having a roommate. Third, I tend to be blunt, abrupt, and hard to get along with, but usually I only talk about stuff like who's mess is this, and I'm enough of a slob myself that I can't fuss much with feeling guilty."

"Fine," he said, shrugging. "No problem. There's no girlfriend in my near future, anyway. What I need is quiet at night and low rent. As long as you're not much worse than I am, we can probably get along." Then he flashed me a shy little grin and I found myself half-melted.

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"What do you mean, 'not much worse'?" I tried to sound indignant.

"A slob. I've got some problems of my own, but I don't imagine they'll bother you any more than yours will bother me." He looked straight into my eyes; his were a warm brown color, but they were calm, thoughtful, almost expressionless. He shrugged again. "I'd like to live here. If you're willing to have me, Kim, let's get the money stuff and so forth worked out, and then as a goodwill gesture, after I get my shopping done I'll make dinner for both of us. I know it reflects badly on my masculinity, but I do make a decent quiche."

"I don't have much in the way of cooking stuff—"

"Mine is in my car, along with everything else I own — I've been sleeping in Dr. Dillard's basement the past three days. I was hoping to find a place today so I could hit the used furniture stores tomorrow."

I nodded. "Well, it looks like you found a place." I named a figure for his rent; he agreed, and we went downstairs to unpack his car. The whole thing was simpler than it had ever been before; I was practically giddy with relief.

That evening, when he was in the kitchen making things smell interesting, I stuck my head in and asked, "By the way, what's your field in psych? Will you use me for a case study?"

"Not unless you can bend spoons with your mind. I came here to work with Dr. Dillard — parapsychology."

"Like Rhine used to do?"

"A little different." He sounded kind of shy, and I thought maybe I shouldn't press him, but after he'd neatly diced an onion and put it into a mixing bowl, he said, "You'll find out eventually — what I study is ghosts. In fact I transferred here to do my dissertation because of some problems with Dr. Robbins where I was. Dillard is the only one — besides Robbins — who does the kind of thing I'm interested in. Things at Kissimmee State just got impossible to stand anymore, so I called here and they were willing to take me on, give me some money, and transfer all the credits."

I'm an old faculty brat. I knew what a deal like that this late in the summer meant — they had wanted him badly, so whatever problems he might have had with Robbins, none of them had been due to Dennis's incompetence.

"Do you think you and Dr. Dillard could consider having an article done about you?" I didn't know Dennis yet, of course, but when you make your living doing company newsletters and radio spots for pizza parlors, you jump at any chance to approximate real journalism. "I wouldn't know about what market it would be for—"

His hand tensed on the counter, the knuckles sticking out painfully,

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and I thought, Kim, you've done it again, found the sore spot and poked it, here goes another roommate — but then he took a breath and relaxed, the muscles in his back unknotting. He poured some gloppy stuff into his blender. "Sure, I guess. Maybe for *House Beautiful*, 'Do Your Bedroom in Grad School Cro-Magnon'; or 'Fifty Zillion Ways to Fix Macaroni and Cheese', or maybe just a centerfold in *Playgirl*—"

"You know what I mean."

He made a face. "Yeah, but Dr. Dillard's one experience with that sort of thing was a piece in the *National Enquirer*."

I started to laugh. His eyes flashed as he drew banner headlines in the air. "'Nutty professor wants to know how many volts in a ghost — run your flashlight on Grandpa's spirit?' He found it a little embarrassing. Especially all the phone calls he got from people who wanted to contact Dear Old Aunt Minnie and find out where in the woods she buried that can of money, or to tell him about their experiences with the shade of dear, departed Bowser — 'I just always feel that he's still here, hanging around where the food dish used to be.'" Dennis, I noted, could do a really terrific little-old-lady voice.

"That's not the kind of stuff I write."

"Yeah. But it may take some effort to make Dr. Dillard like the idea. I hope you don't want to start soon."

"No hurry, but do you mind if I keep asking you about your research? I'm just curious — it's not a common thing to study."

"That it's not," he agreed. "So what do you want to know? Have I ever personally seen a ghost? Yes. What was it like? Spooky. Next?"

He was kidding, but there was an undercurrent of pain there. Universities, I knew, could be spectacularly cruel places for anyone doing research on a topic off the beaten track.

"Not so much that," I said, trying to sound unthreatening. "I guess what I really want to know is — you said you have a masters in physics? Where does that come into this? Are you trying to measure ghosts, quantify them?"

"In part," he said, pulling out a pie crust from the oven and neatly arranging the chopped vegetables and cheese in it. He gave the blender a little spin, then poured its contents over the other stuff. (I idly wondered for a moment how he managed to get all those items ready to go at the same time.) "We're beginning to think we may have a physical mechanism for haunting." He slid the quiche into the oven.

"You've just taken me from curious to fascinated," I said. "What kind of physical mechanism?"

"Well, we've got one big verifiable fact: constant exposure to an organic body seems to eventually modify something structurally about the objects

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near it. A block of iron in a dog's cage will change in ways that one in a bank vault won't — and I don't mean it will rust on one side, either."

"If I promise to avoid dumb jokes you've heard before, will you relax?"

He put up his hands, as if I held him at gunpoint. "Promise me that and I'll do anything. Sorry I'm so touchy — where was I?"

"The block of iron and the dog."

"Yeah, right. It's hot here by the stove — let's sit in the dining room." We did. He leaned way back, hands behind his head, and thought for a moment. "I don't know if I can talk about the subject without defending it. I don't know if I ever have . . . O.K., the iron block. Certain none-too-transparent things change, things you can pick up with nuclear magnetic resonance and scanning X-rays, and certain tricks of holography and thermography, if you know what you're looking for. All very small, down at just about the level where we can barely measure at all — but the interesting thing is that most of those subtle changes are counterentropic. Somehow, some way, a small amount of energy, or information, or both, is being stored.

"The block of iron just happens to be something extremely easy to study. Blocks of every other metal we can afford also work. Wood is too complex, and the measurement problems get too severe, but sulfur crystals and graphite work, too, and salt crystals and most kinds of glass work. The shape doesn't matter either — we've tried spheres,tetrahedrons, cubes, and some simple asymmetric combinations — we haven't tried irregular shapes because of meaurement problems, but there's no reason to suppose that they'd be any different.

"We've established a few things. Patterns seem to form faster and stronger if the inducer is a large, complex, integrated organism — a bowl of yeast won't do much. It helps, too; if the animal is alive, but it's not necessary — a dead dog still produces more changes than a live starfish. And an excited, upset, high-strung animal does it more than a calm one."

"And something plays the patterns back? That's what a ghost is?"

He seemed a little startled — I guess I had gotten too excited, or he wasn't used to somebody who didn't laugh. "We don't know. But we do have some physical data recorded in 'haunted houses' — and they show distinct heat flows whenever ghost phenomena are observed. Whether more energy is stored, somehow, than what we can observe, or there's some process analogous to an amplifier, there's some energy there, and it comes from somewhere — the question is how it happens to get organized into a 'ghost.' Dr. Dillard and I disagree on what the exact physical process is — well, actually, he and Robbins disagree, but I agree with Robbins." He flipped his hands up-

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ward — there was something strangely gentle in it, as big as he was. "That's really all. If the tech stuff is of interest—"

"I do some science writing. I know enough to follow you, if I do the piece. My God, this is fantastic! How far away from publishing are you?"

"That's the rub." He sighed. "Maybe four or five years. We need documentation and replicability — and a reasonable theory of why these things are happening. Always assuming Robbins doesn't beat us out."

This didn't sound much like an article project. I shrugged and said so, which seemed to be a relief to him, and we talked about nothing for some minutes. Then the quiche was done, so I grabbed some of my hodgepodge dishes and silver and set the table, throwing in a bottle of white wine from my private anti-insomnia stock.

The meal was wonderful. We didn't say a thing the whole way through it, except that I stopped every few bites to tell him it was great; I think he was flattered. Finally, with absolutely no leftovers of either quiche or wine, we both sat back in a pleasant half-stupor. "There's a decent coffeehouse two blocks up the street, if you want dessert," I suggested.

"Coffee sounds good, anyway," he said. "Lead on, roomie."

He refrained from teasing me about the three deadbolts on the door, scoring half a dozen more points right there. I'm not sure what all we talked about that night — mostly his work and mine, I think — but it was fun, anyway, and we were just sort of laughing and joking our way back, enjoying the summer evening, when I did something typical. "Dennis, can I ask you something?"

"As long as I can refuse to answer."

"It's probably none of my business."

"If it is, I'll tell you."

"What kind of trouble was there between you and Robbins? Your work is obviously good enough, or Longfellow U. wouldn't have offered you that deal — so why did you go to all this bother to get away from him?"

"Well." He didn't look at me. "Uh. Two reasons, I guess. One is because he's a son of a bitch. The other one I don't want to talk about. Ever."

"Sorry."

"It's O.K."

And that was the last thing he said that night.

The whole way back I kept wanting to take his hand or hug him or something, but after all, I barely knew him. I felt dumb, and I was half-afraid he'd move out in the morning as it was, and I didn't want to mess up a potentially great roommate situation by getting something else into it. Aside from hating to feel like I'm making promises I can't keep, I'd lost a couple of previous roommates when things had gone badly.

We just went back to the apart-

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ment, and he curled up in his sleeping bag in his room, and I went to my room, without even saying good night. Eventually I got worn out enough from telling myself I was stupid, and I fell asleep.

I'm not very observant, except on the job, where I have to make a real, conscious effort. I have to force myself to remember areas I don't want to walk into after dark. I've been known to forget what I'm wearing. And God knows, with my habit of barging in, I don't have many friends.

So August and September were gone, and it was the last few warm days around the middle of October before I really noticed anything odd going on with Dennis. Not that he was invisible or anything — if I talked to him, he always seemed glad to have a conversation, but it was innocuous stuff, my work or his or something about the apartment. A few times we went to a party or a movie together just to have company and something to do; then we'd tend to stay up till all hours talking — lonely people getting a fix of human company tend to overdose. Once we took an all-day walk in the park because it was Saturday and the weather was glorious.

Whenever either of us would accidentally touch the other, we'd apologize. Neither of us ever tried deliberately. I figured he was gay, or a gentleman, or I just wasn't his type, and quit worrying, or at least mostly.

The evening after the walk in the park, he'd had an extra beer with the pizza, and he went in and crashed out right after we got home. I wasn't sleepy yet, so I decided to correct a little "Are You an Alcoholic?" piece I was working on, but after I sat down at the word processor, I remembered Dennis had borrowed my dictionary. He was so sound asleep he might as well have been embalmed, so I decided to just slip into his room and get it off his desk.

I opened the door; the light from the hall fell on the desk, and I stepped in to get the dictionary.

"No," he said suddenly, very loudly.

"Sorry, I just needed—"

He snored.

I opened the door a little wider, and when the light fell on him, I saw that he was sound asleep. For a moment I almost giggled with relief; it hadn't occurred to me that he might be talking in his sleep.

Then I saw the tears streaming down over his face, and his lips twitching and trembling. "No," he said again, and this time I heard the desperation in his voice.

I looked away. Whatever the matter was, it was none of my business. But when I reached to get the dictionary and get out, I suddenly felt really funny — not just with embarrassment, but something that made my

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hair stand up, like a cold draft had blown through the room. I looked up, half expecting to see the window open.

There was a woman — no, a girl, she looked to be just out of high school — standing over his bed, her hand resting on his forehead. She was beautiful and slim with a perfectly proportioned, firm, taut body and a clear, lively face, the kind of beauty that is possible, briefly, only when you're eighteen or nineteen. Her thick, dark hair fell to her waist; she was naked.

He was sobbing now, shaking the bed so hard it seemed inconceivable that he didn't wake up, and she stroked his face tenderly, smiling to herself.

Suddenly she looked up at me. "What are you doing in our room?"

"I — "

"He hangs around you too much as it is. Don't you dare touch him, ever."

I really didn't know what to say; I looked down, feeling somehow ashamed, as if I'd interrupted someone's lovemaking or been caught reading a private diary.

When I looked up, she wasn't there.

"It seems like his affair, and besides, we're getting along pretty well. Anyway, I wouldn't know how to bring it up — he's really good about respecting my privacy; I don't want to violate his," I was explaining to Cindy at lunch the next day. I had told her about my little discovery the night before, leaving out the girl — I had no idea of what to make of that, and was more than ready to believe it had been a vivid dream that had gotten mixed up with the memory.

Even though I haven't had a dream I could recall since I was a small child.

As usual, she was no help. "Well, all right. Pass up an opportunity."

"Opportunity?"

"You know," she said casually, spearing a forkful of salad and jabbing it in the general direction of her mouth. "Catch the dear boy at a sad moment, ask him whatever's the matter, pull his head down on that soft shoulder, and—"

I snorted.

"It's not such a bad idea," she said. Another jumbo forkful hit the area around her mouth; most of it went in. "God, he's cute. And you say his friends think he's brilliant?"

"Not exactly his friends — the psych department flag football team. I think they're impressed with his masters in physics — most social scientists are in awe of the hard stuff."

"Physics, eh? Well, then, if he drops out, he can make huge heaps of money in private industry. He looks better all the time." She slid around a little, letting the slit in her skirt fall open. I was going to tell her about it, but then I noticed there was a nice-looking guy in a three-piece suit look-

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at that leg, and decided that it was either deliberate or it would be if I told her about it. "Thinking of something?" she asked.

I shook my head. "Not really." I had been about to say I was thinking about how people change, but that would have gotten her going with all the sympathy and concern routine — *I'm* the one who's changed — and I didn't need that.

"Well, then let's talk some more about that hunk you live with. If you really don't want him, sweets, throw him to me." She tugged her skirt closed with a little squirm; the guy in the three-piece suit had gotten engrossed in a conversation. "God knows, I've always done pretty well on your leavings, at least till recently. No, don't snort again — it makes my nose hurt to hear you. And it's true —guys used to get a lot crazier about you than about me — you were downright adorable in school, Blondie, and that was only three years ago. You could even come back to modeling—"

"As long as I didn't do swimsuits," I said flatly. "I know."

She took a couple more bites, looking down at her plate. "Anyway, what's he doing? Working on a Nobel Prize in psych, or something?"

It was something I'd been looking forward to. "Ghosts. He's working on ghosts."

She gaped at me, which with Cindy is always impressive because she has a mouth wider than all outdoors. The waiter came by right then, and we both ordered cheesecake to give him something to do.

"I'm not kidding," I said, shaking my head.

"You mean there really are ghosts?"

"He thinks so."

"Oh, well, frankly, I'd agree with that guy if he said the world was flat." She laughed. "Are you going to get some articles out of this? You have that glint in your eye —"

"He's a long way from where he should be — if the publicity is going to be on any level above Ripley's. No, the glint was a totally different idea. I get them a lot."

"Yeah, but always about things like a new profile for *Window-Washer's Quarterly* or a better commercial for Rizzetti's Pizza. You never get them about anything important."

Dessert arrived and we dug into it — fortunately, because if I'd had to explain my idea, Cindy would have taken it all the wrong way. Dennis didn't want to be asked about how he left Kissimmee State, and I hadn't. But that was before I realized that there was a certain interest to him —not the kind that my lusty old sorority sister had, I told myself firmly, remembering my last couple of experiments. All the same, he was intriguing — even apart from what had happened the night before. And somehow the combination of what I had seen and

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what he was studying seemed like more than a coincidence . . . .

The local paper, or some inflight, could probably use a travel article about Kissimmee. No, no question, I thought, putting away the last of the cheesecake. A couple of days in Kissimmee might be very interesting.

Besides, the idea of investigating a ghost made me feel like Brenda Starr. I had already decided that if I got a book out of this, I wanted Jane Fonda to play me in the movie.

After a while you learn: universities are all alike. One thing that threw me for part of a morning was that Robbins turned out to be in the physics department, but once I found that out, I was home free.

If you want to know something in a university department, go to the secretary. In this particular case, Mrs. Knoll turned out to be about a hundred and ten years old, desperately overweight, and a heavy smoker; she sat there wheezing as I hit her with my number one cover story. "So, anyway, while I'm working up the travel piece for *Orange Airlines Magazine,* I figured I might check around for interesting research being done here at the university. A lot of the time when a school is off the beaten track, it doesn't get all the credit it should for research going on there, and I can write something that will get picked up on the wire services, and make some money off it."

She smiled at me, and then started coughing with that arf-arf noise that fat old smokers make; that went on for quite a while. "It'll have to be better than that, honey," she finally said, after her breath howled back in. "You're media, and don't tell me you haven't heard about poor Dr. Robbins' troubles. You won't get anything here." Her smile was very sweet, very firm, and absolutely frozen onto her face.

Sometimes you just improvise. "Surely he has his side of it to tell."

"He sure does. But he can't depend on you people to tell it, any more than the president can, darling. Now you just trundle out of here. Everything there's going to be about it has already been in the papers."

I had a sudden feeling about why Dennis reacted the way he did when I mentioned an article, and winced — I hate to know when I've stabbed someone's feelings. The old lady's smile was still plastered on, and the smell of the room was beginning to get to me. "You mean everything from the other side," I said, as a parting shot. "Nothing from the university's side has." I turned to go, still wishing I knew what the hell I was talking about.

"I'll talk to the young lady, Grassie, it's all right." He was tall enough to look downward at my five-eight, and broad in the shoulders besides. His jet-black hair was in tight curls around

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his well-tanned face, and his little goatee was geometrically trim.

His clothes were somehow perfectly casual, but a shade dressier than casual, an obviously expensive tennis shirt, slacks something just-slightly nicer than you'd expect.

But I noticed all of that later, after first getting a big dose of those piercing blue eyes.

"I overheard a little of the conversation, Ms. Kersakoff," he said, smiling. "It certainly is true that not all the publicity has been what we'd have wanted it to be. It's already cost me my top graduate student . . . but maybe you'd like to explain to me how things would be different this time. If you'd like, we could have lunch together in the cafeteria at the Student Center. I was just going over there now . . . "

And, almost as if I'd been hypnotized, I found myself walking alongside him across the campus. He certainly did have his charms — except that I happened to remember that my name had gotten mentioned only at the very beginning of my little chat with the secretary. Therefore, Robbins had been listening from out in the hall the whole time.

"Are you a stringer for one of the wire services?" he asked suddenly.

"Freelance. Doing a travel thing for the Orange Airlines inflight. That much is true."

"But you wouldn't mind picking up on something else."

"That psychic stuff sells," I said, trying to sound like a jaded and cynical Old Journalistic Hand.

"Well, what I have here is pretty dramatic," he said. His hands were in his pockets and he was shuffling along in a perfect imitation of a hot young researcher near his big break; I remember that about the only thing Dennis had ever said about Robbins was that he "looked like he was posing all the time for any *People* magazine photographer that might turn up."

He had probably intended to cue me into asking him some big questions, but I wasn't going to do that —I thought I might learn more by just letting him open up. "The cafeteria's this way," he said, taking my arm —and keeping it.

We took a corner table; he sat a little closer than I'd have preferred, his hand on his knee, almost on my thigh. Lunch was two fish sticks, some cold french fries, and some sodden coleslaw; cafeteria food was everything I remembered. Out the window there were a couple of sick-looking palms and a brand new ugly brick box labeled LIFE SCIENCES BUILDING.

"Look," I said. "I made the guess that there was a side of the story that hadn't been told. To tell you the truth, all I know is what AP and UPI put out — which is just that you had a volunteer experimental subject commit suicide."

He nodded.

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I dropped what I hoped was a bomb. "Dennis Gerard wouldn't tell me anything."

"Dennis?" he said. "Where is he?"

His intensity was downright scary; those bright blue eyes seemed to be drilling straight into my face. "I don't know right now," I said. "Drifting around, if he's like I last saw him."

"Could you find him again?"

"I might — if it was worth it."

His fingers brushed my thigh. I felt a wave of nausea, like I used to get right after I got out of the hospital. I crossed my legs and turned them farther away from him. "I need to know what's going on," I said. "If this stuff is salable, maybe I'll bring him back, if I can find him and persuade him. But I need to know what the story is. You're both ghost hunters, aren't you?"

I knew how Dennis hated that term; sure enough, Robbins winced, too. "You could call it that. We're investigating how they come into being, how they manifest themselves. The girl, Natalie Erinsen, was mentally unbalanced — had developed an intense crush on Gerard. She had been terminated as an experimental subject, but she apparently went on with the experimental protocol using herself as a subject without observers or safety precautions. Suicide is probably the wrong classification, whatever that idiot coroner said. I think accident is a better term — she was doing something dangerous without proper safeguards, and her luck ran out."

"And Dennis Gerard felt responsible?"

"There were circumstances . . . but that's not why we need him back. I think it would be easier to show you than to tell you. Could we meet for dinner tonight?"

"Is that where you're going to show me?"

"After that."

I'll bet, I thought. "And what is it I'm supposed to see?"

He smiled at me, a killer grin that swept once across my body and then locked onto my face to see how I had liked being optically undressed. "I'm going to show you her ghost," he said with a triumphant little curl of the mouth.

We made the arrangements quickly; by being fast with a nod, I managed to avoid shaking his hand. I went back to my motel room and took a fast shower, scrubbing hard, but it didn't help much; I was just as tense and just as disgusted.

The dinner had been nothing to brag about; I had worn my most modest suit, left the makeup at home, and switched to my Clark Kent glasses, so I don't suppose I was much for him either.

"What is this place?" I asked as we pulled up.

"The house her parents rented for her. They fortunately didn't want her

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possessions back — too rich to be bothered with them, I guess. I rented the place with my own money as soon as I heard what she had been doing and what was going on here. Hopefully, once I have enough recorded results, the university will reimburse me. Come on in."

We went in; he didn't turn any lights on, so I didn't. The thought that kept crossing my mind was that here I was all alone in the dark with this creep, but he didn't try to touch me.

We had sat quietly for thirty-two minutes by my watch when there was a faint, icy draft across my face. I tried to think firmly of local entropy reversal and all the things Dennis had talked about, but still it felt like a cold wind from an open tomb, smelling of clay and decay.

She was suddenly there, incredibly beautiful in a little baby-doll nightgown; for all it covered, she might as well have been naked. As I had somehow known it would be, it was the girl I had seen in his room. "Dennis," she said, "Dennis, just for you, Dennis, please." She slowly knelt on the floor — I noticed abstractedly that the thick carpet did not depress under her knees. "Dennis," she whispered again.

And just as abruptly she was hanging, thrashing, by a rope from the ceiling, the stool beneath her tipped over, the release catch the rope was attached to sticking, as she struggled, fought, kicked for air, the sweet, tender face turning horribly dark and distorted, all in eerie silence as the cold wind blew across my face, until she was still, hanging like a broken doll from a hook in a repair shop.

The wind bludgeoned against us; I was shoved back against the wall. It was in my face like a huge, dead amphibian out of a cave, suffocating me, and there was a bright light around her face as she looked up from the noose and cried out, "Dennis!" once again.

Something that was way down deep, far below the rational, grabbed me, and I ran, stumbling over furniture and flinging myself out the door, down the walk, to stand in the sanity under a streetlight, sobbing for breath. Robbins followed along, more slowly. "That's what I mean," he said. "That little display happens every single night."

I had him drive me back to the motel; I went straight in, changed into jeans and a sweatshirt, came back out, and sat up drinking coffee the rest of the night in the coffee shop. I might have read two Agatha Christie's — I remember my eyes running over them and turning the pages. I caught the next flight out; the local Chamber of Commerce had already given me enough material for the travel piece anyway.

When I got home, Dennis was on the couch. He was staring at me

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intently. I carefully put my suitcase into my room, closed the door, turned to him, and said, "O.K., you know something. Probably you're mad. What's up?"

He laughed, but it didn't sound like anything was really funny. "Kim, didn't anyone ever tell you that when you violate sombody's privacy, they don't have to defend themselves?" I looked down at the floor; he went on. "What I want to know, really, is why. What would make you spend so much time and money trying to track me down?"

I sat down. "I don't know. It just felt like I should do it. I don't think I ever gave it any thought."

He crossed his arms and sighed. "So what did you find out? What do you think? Will I have to move?"

"I saw the ghost. You were right to leave." I swallowed hard. "And it was none of my business, I guess. I'm sorry — I won't pry again. You've been a great roommate — please don't move out."

I got up and walked into my room, head up and dignified just like modeling class, and closed the door behind me. Then I lay down on the bed for a good, hard cry, trying to make no noise at all.

After a long time there was a knock and the door opened. "Kim." He said it flatly, with no expression at all. I heard him walking across the floor toward me.

He sat down on the bed, careful not to touch me. After a while I stopped crying, and felt like I should say something.

"Look, I'm sorry. You have every right to be angry. I don't even know why I went poking into your business. I really like having you here; I promise I won't —" I was starting to cry again.

He put his hand on the back of my neck, brushing my hair away. I could feel myself wanting to stiffen, to turn away, but I made myself relax. After a minute it felt good to have his hand there, and I relaxed some more.

"I found out what you were doing from Cindy. She came by," he explained. "We ended up going to dinner together."

My good old buddy. Someday I am going to kill her, slowly.

"We ended up spending the evening talking about you — which I think was the only way I fended her off. Does she always come on that strong?"

It's hard to snort with your face in a pillow, so I rolled over and managed half a smile at him.

"I didn't know what to think," he said. "I still don't. Kim, she told me the whole story about your attack. I feel like I've pried at least as much as you have."

I winced. "You didn't hunt her down to find out."

"I didn't stop her, either."

"You're sweet," I said, wiping my glasses with the corner of the sheet,

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"but I'm the one that owes apologies here." I sat up next to him and took his hand. "You're not going to leave, are you?"

"I like you. For some weird reason I still trust you. If you want me to move, I'll move, but I'd like to stay friends, too,"

And then I was really frightened — because I wanted to kiss him, and I knew the disaster that that would lead to. "I guess if you had any questions, I could answer them," I said carefully: "You know, a pry for a pry."

"And a truth for a truth?" he asked innocently. I hit him with a pillow. He went to tickle me, putting his hands on my waist, *right on my belt, touching my skin like he was going to jerk down my jeans* — I stiffened up like a plank.

He let go of me right away. "Sorry."

"It's all right. I trust you. You just startled me."

Then we both sat there, shy and embarrassed. Finally he said, "Just — Cindy got the story right? It was your boyfriend at the time?"

"Fiancé. Yeah. And he wanted to 'play a little game' that started out with tying me up. Later I found out I was the third girl he'd done that to — he had a rich daddy to buy him out of trouble. His 'little game' scared me into breaking toilet training and left a bunch of nasty scars on my chest and stomach and thighs. I'm lucky he didn't get to my face before Cindy got home, and I'm even luckier that he didn't get me pregnant — apparently his special occasion was too much for him to bother with the birth control." I looked straight at Dennis. "So, anyway, I'm a mess. How're you?"

"Not good," he said. "Look, as long as we're confessing, can I really burden you? I mean, give you the whole story?"

This, it occurred to me, was how I should have found out in the first place. "Sure."

"Just a minute, then," he said, getting up. He went quickly across the hall into his room. A moment later he came back with the biggest scrapbook I'd ever seen.

"A Dennis's mother production, starring Dennis, a wholly owned subsidiary," he said. "Every time I ever got in the newspaper, every little document that ever carried my name around our little town, complete with Mom's notes."

"How did you—"

"Oh, Mom died a few years ago. This got left to me. I was gonna burn it, but somehow I couldn't do that to someone's lifework."

"Your father—"

"Took one good look around when I was about two, and split. I like to think I inherited his good sense, but I doubt it."

I took the book and opened it, leafing through slowly at first, then flipping to the high school and college years. "All this is you?" I finally asked.

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"Yeah, Eagle Scout, four-oh, three letters, prom king, the works. Phi Beta Kappa and a couple of league records in small-college sports on top of that. Wait till you get to the last page."

It was a group of snapshots of girls, a matrix of them, four by six with one down below. Each one had a name and a set of dates; there was an odd effect of progression, because the girls at the top of the page were young, seventh or eighth graders, and the ones at the bottom looked to be in their early twenties.

I couldn't stop a small giggle. "More of your accomplishments? What's a girl have to do to get on this page?"

"Go steady. Get noticed by Mom . . . " He looked at them for a moment. "See the numbers? Ones to tens, right? Mom's rating on how perfect they were. Stacey here got a nine — Mom almost had me married off to her."

I looked up at him. "So what does all this have to do with Natalie Erinsen's ghost?"

"Let's see. Her slot would be right — there." I noticed there were two more spaces between the last one and where he pointed. Oh, well, if my mother had been given to that, there'd be quite a few snapshots in my book, too.

"You could say my mother never got over being eighteen. That was how old she was, and driving several frat houses crazy, when Dad accidentally got her pregnant. At least, that's how he tells it; her version was always heavy on the wine, roses, and consuming passion. Anyway, aside from diapers and so on, the only thing Mom really knew was high school. There were all these things the right people did in school at every step, and Mom pushed me to all of them.

"For some stupid reason, it was easier to just do what she wanted. I never had any trouble with grades or sports or anything else I tried. It was even kind of fun, though I spent a lot of time wondering if I had any desires of my own — the usual angst of a successful teenager."

I nodded; I knew how that felt.

"I suppose if I'd been awkward, ugly, dumb, and gauche, I'd have had an entirely different experience; but as it was I breezed right through. The only problem I had was that I was always hearing my mother bragging over my shoulder, and that was just embarrassing — no big deal, though it seemed like one at the time.

"Anyway, at the start of my junior year of college, she died.

"She left me quite a bit of money, by college student standards. I got an old car and decided I'd just drive around and sort things out, 'find myself' I guess is what you call it. That went on for a couple of years, during which I did everything Mom wouldn't have liked — dated the wrong girls,

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dressed crummy, worked with my hands, the whole slumming trip. I guess it started out to prove something and then just lasted on for a while after whatever it was was proved.

"Finally I got back into college, more for the change than anything else, and did a double major in physics and psych, mostly because they were easy for me. I read a paper by Robbins, wrote him a fan letter, he wrote back to try to get me to do grad school at Kissimmee State, and eventually I ended up doing research under him."

He stopped there for a moment, staring at the wall, jaw working. "Natalie turned up as a freshman when I was a couple of years into it, more or less Robbin's chief assistant by then. My God, she was beautiful, Kim . . . and a cheerleader, danced better than you can imagine, you name it, all the stuff to be. Spoiled rotten, too, I guess you'd have to say — parents practically worshipped her — but she was so sweet, so gentle, too, I guess because she had never really been hurt or frustrated.

"On Mom's scale she was a nine, easy." He took out his wallet. "Here."

The photograph was worn, but there was no question, it was Natalie, but with a change of hairstyle and —I realized. "This is your mother?"

"Yeah. Quite a resemblance, isn't it?"

"I thought it was Natalie. They're almost perfectly alike."

"Well, not really. Mom gained a lot of weight in a hurry after she got married, and never really lost it. What Natalie looked like, from my standpoint, was the old pictures of my mother — the ones she used to haul out and show me for hours when I was four or five years old."

"Anyway, that was Natalie — exactly what my mother would have prescribed. And she was a virgin — which she had decided I was the one to deal with.

"I was pretty uninterested. I mean, she was cute, but undergrads are sort of off-limits anyway, and I really didn't want to get into something like that — I'd had too much of it already." He stopped suddenly and blushed. "Sorry, Kim, that wasn't true. I did say I'd tell the truth, didn't I?"

He looked away out the window, clutching his arms as if he were cold. "I ached for that girl. Pure conditioned reflex, I guess, but I was more turned on by her than by anyone I'd ever seen — and it was so sick," he added. He leaned back and stared at the ceiling. "One night, about suppertime, she was the last subject, and we were all alone in the lab together, and she was really flirting up a storm. I was deliberately trying to gross her out, staring at her body and stuff — but it just seemed to turn her on. Finally I decided what the hell; if it's offered, I'd be a fool not to take it . . . so I asked her to dinner, at my place.

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"I outdid myself cooking, and managed to get into a decent pair of pants and shirt on the side. For some reason I felt nervous, like a kid on his first date; I kept fiddling, getting my one tablecloth onto the table just right, candles burning, right music on, the whole works.

"The doorbell rang, and I went to answer it, butterflies doing fifty crazy circles in my gut.

"She was in white — that was certainly her kind of gesture. It was a crisp, cool-looking dress, clingy and low cut on top and sort of a bell-shaped short skirt; she had on white stockings and white pumps with it. That beautiful dark hair was loose, falling all the way to her waist. I took her hand and led her to the table; she smelled wonderful, clean and warm, and her skin was so smooth and tanned . . .

"Dinner was over fast. I drank a lot of wine with it. Over dessert she was flirting more than ever. I felt excited and attracted and all — but at the same time I was repelled. She barely knew me; here she was giving me this big romantic act, and the whole thing was just for her entertainment. She sat there flirting and suggesting, like I was a puppet and she was pulling the strings."

He sat there clenched and tight; his fingers sank into the muscles in his arms until I thought he must be getting bruises. I stayed absolutely quiet, just waiting for him to go on.

"Kim, I was crazy as all hell. She was just a kid having a lot of fun with her own attractiveness to an older guy.

"But at the time it felt like an attack, like she was deliberately manipulating me, and at the same time . . ."

He was quiet again.

"Did you rape her?" I asked.

"No." He was swallowing hard again. "But I rushed her, and I made her do things she wasn't ready for . . . I just took her for my own pleasure, insulting her the whole time. I used her.

"The whole time she kept moaning, 'I love you, Dennis.' She never complained, though I could tell she was having a lousy time — somehow I enjoyed that even more.

"As soon as I was done, I made her put her clothes on and more or less threw her out. She was crying, asking what she'd done. I didn't say a thing to her then — or at the lab the next time she came by. When she phoned I hung up.

"After a while I talked Robbins into dropping her from the project.

"End of story, I thought."

He got up and look out the window, staring at the old brick building across the way. "The project was based on something we knew from animal work. The 'ghost-making' process works better if the animal is under stress. That happens to tie in perfectly with folk traditions, which

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have ghosts haunting the sites of murders and suicides — presumably those are high-stress situations. So we'd hire the undergrads, choke them close to unconscious, and take measurements on the iron block under the chair we strapped them into. And sure enough, we got strong patterns, some of the strongest we'd seen. A couple of times we even got some faint observables — just instruments, nothing visible — heat flows like what we got in the haunted houses.

"After Robbins dropped her as a subject, her campaign got more and more intense — phone calls every night, flowers, love letters, the works. Finally one day she told me what she was up to — she was doing the experiments at home, as she put it, because if she could make a ghost in her house, I'd have to come over."

He sat down on the windowsill, giving me a desperate stare. "Kim, I swear I had no idea what she was playing with!"

I got up and came over to him, putting my hands on his shoulders. "I believe you." I ran a hand over the back of his head, mussing his hair. I was feeling very weird and confused, so I just blurted out, "Did you know about the ghost?"

"Oh, yeah. Robbins wants to get a reading with me present in the room. He wants me to actually go into the room with it."

His hair was so soft and so thick. "Are you afraid?"

"Yeah."

"Do you want to do it?"

"Yes and no. I wish it were over."

"I'll go with you, if it will help."

"It will," he said firmly. He looked up and smiled for the first time I'd seen that day. "It'll help."

Not having an assignment this time, I rode down to Kissimmee with Dennis in his car. We talked a lot on the way down, mostly about ghost physics, of course, but also just the kind of mutual interest things that people talk about when they're getting to know each other, fifties rock and roll and Big Ten basketball, in our case. We lived on fast food with endless bags of Doritos and cans of pop in between. The trip took a day and a half, with a stopover at a campground to crash out in Dennis's pup tent. I guess I felt a little sad when it was over.

We were making the turn off the expressway to head for Kissimmee State when I finally blurted out, "Dennis, I'm really scared."

"Me, too."

"No, I mean about one of the things that you told me. Is it possible — could she actually kill you?"

He sighed. "Not deliberately, anyway. As far as we can tell, a ghost is stored information, sort of like a computer program. Ones that appear every night like that are kind of caught in a loop . . . so she's at most a very

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small fragment of who she was when she was alive, playing over and over again like a stuck record. No matter how much she might have resented me, her ghost doesn't have the stored information — or the decision-making ability — to do anything about it. I hope."

"I think there's something I should tell you," I said. "Probably I should have told you before now." He stayed quiet while I told him about Natalie's appearance while he slept.

"I'd been wondering why sometimes I wake up so tired," he said finally. He squirmed a little in his seat and fished something out of his pocket, then handed it to me. "This turned up in the mail two days after she died. She'd been wearing it — she wanted to know if it had a pattern." It was a slim, elegant little gold bracelet. "I kept it and the letter — I didn't want to test it, but I also couldn't bring myself to sell it or throw it away, so it just stayed in my pocket from the day I unwrapped it.

"So there's the physical part of the explanation. Now, what's fascinating is that you got actual, interactive behavior out of it. I'm glad you told me about it —"

I wasn't much reassured. "That wasn't quite what I was getting at. What I mean is, it might not just be a replay — and it seems to be an awfully strong ghost. You might actually be in some danger from her. What about that business, the folk tradition about kissing a ghost?"

He shrugged. "I won't kiss her."

"What if she touches you?"

"Good question. I think that's what Robbins wants to find out . . . but, look, Kim, it's not that bad, O.K.?" Our guess is that a ghost just draws a lot of energy from any warm body."

"Dillard thinks emotional involvement has a lot to do with how big the effect is, you said." I hated to keep pestering — I felt like his little sister — but somehow I just had to.

"That's Dillard's guess. He's got this idea that all ghosts communicate, so he thinks everything depends on the message going in. I suppose what you saw partly confirms his guess, but I still don't see how it's possible — to interact, it has to have some kind of random-access memory, and I don't see how that can be, physically. And besides, I'm not emotionally involved, anyway — never was."

"Yeah." I thought about Natalie in her nightie, her skin so smooth, so flawless and young and unscarred. "You know your own mind. Sorry."

"Besides," he added, "Even the business about kissing the ghost — the people who did that, even if it was a big thermal drain, died of hypothermia, not of the evil hoodoo. And hypothermia is something they deal with pretty well nowadays. At worst I'll come away with a bad cold."

"Sure." I tried to brighten up, and pointed at the stadium. "Is that where

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you scored all the touchdowns?"

"Just my senior year, after I transferred. And at a little school like this, it isn't all that hard to be impressive — local high schools've been known to kick Kissimmee's Keister."

"Great alliteration." I said. "Ever thought of getting into poetry?"

"I've always been very attracted to fields beginning with *P*," he said solemnly. It was pretty doubtful that either of us felt any better, but neither of us was going to let the other one know. I don't remember saying another word till we got to Robbins's office; I just watched Dennis.

To my surprise, Robbins was cordial and didn't seem to make a thing of my previous trip under false pretenses — he did let me know that he thought I had the legs for a skirt. He even let us wash up and catch a nap at his apartment, and then took us out to dinner.

"He sure can be charming when you've got something he wants, can't he?" Dennis murmured in my ear as he pulled out my chair.

I snorted, and to cover that, I added, "All those muscles and a perfect gentleman besides?"

"Actually I was just setting up to pull it out from under you," he said, grinning. "O.K., the rule on the menu here is if it comes out of the ocean or has sweet and sour sauce, it's good; if it's pork or beef or Szechuan, it's awful."

We managed to decide on sweet and sour shrimp and hot and spicy fish in record time; Robbins added wonton soup, which was a good idea because it came right away and none of us had to talk.

While Dennis was in the bathroom after dinner, Robbins smiled and leaned forward. "Interested in Dennis?"

"Would I be here if I weren't?"

He nodded, grinning at me. "Just hope you have better luck than the last one."

"I don't know that I'm interested that way," I said, hoping to cut him off.

"He really is kind of a fool, you know," he added. "He could have had the pleasure, waited a few weeks for her to get tired of him, and as long as he kept things discreet, he'd have had no trouble of any kind. God knows half the faculty has had its way with some adolescent's private areas. It's very pleasant, not very dangerous, and breaks up the monotony of academe. Frankly I don't know how *I'd* live without it."

At that point Dennis got back, which relieved me of having to listen to any more. There wasn't much to say, so we just got back into Robbins's van, and went to the lab to load up with instruments, and went from there to the house to set up.

The room was absolutely dark except for the red glow from a few little lights on a few instruments; I could

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just barely make out the shapes of some of the furniture. Dennis was holding my hand — well, my wrist, but Dr. Corbin would have been proud of me for not fretting about it. Robbins was fiddling with instruments and cameras, probably just to cover his own nerves.

When she appeared it was sudden; she was in the same nightie, calling for Dennis again. He squeezed so hard that I wanted to yell, but I quietly worked loose from him.

Suddenly, with just one little abstract pat on my knee, he was up, crossing the room to her. "I'm here, Natalie," he said quietly.

She turned and faced him. Robbins swore under his breath.

Lightly, she stepped forward; she was beautiful, elegant, with a sadness and a delicacy that made me want to burst into tears. She stepped straight up to him and raised her face. "I've been waiting for you," she said. "I love you."

He was staring at her, face frozen and expressionless. I saw him swallow hard and blink twice. She was now so vivid that anyone would have mistaken her for a living woman. His hands came forward and met hers. I screamed, "No!" at the top of my lungs just as they kissed.

He nodded to her once and walked back toward us. "Good-bye, Natalie," he said. She was suddenly not there anymore. Robbins was hopping around like a maniac, trying to see what all his dials said at the same time. I had half risen from my chair to run to Dennis.

Suddenly the room was bright as day. Natalie hung from the rafters, kicking and swinging, the toppled stool out of reach. Her fingers scrabbled wildly, breaking her long, polished nails as she tried to open the jammed release. "I want Dennis!" a voice screamed, not coming from the madly plunging, struggling figure but from all around us, as if the room were alive with her. "Dennis, I want you.!"

The apartment exploded. Books, papers, pots, pans, lamps, clothing, all untouched since her death, crashed and thumped and sailed through the air. Closet doors and drawers flew open and more things poured out of them. Dennis, Robbins, and I wound up crouched behind the same couch. The wailing was like putting your head in a running jet engine; the light was blinding, but I noticed that there was no shadow of Natalie on the wall, ceiling, or floor. A book whizzed over the couch, just missing my head, and socked a hole in the plaster behind me.

"Stay down," Dennis said straight into my ear.

"Fascinating," Robbins said. "How do you feel?"

"All right. It was just cold. I nerved myself up to stay uninvolved — just walked through it like an actor. It sure triggered a response."

"You bastard!" I slapped him hard

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and full in the face.

He gaped at me, flabbergasted. I hardly knew what I was yelling in his ear. "You just rejected that poor kid again. And you gave the ghost a lot more energy to work with. Don't you understand — she did this dozens of times! That's why her ghost is so strong!" I was so furious I grabbed him by the shirt and would have shaken him if he'd been anywhere near my size. "You reinforced her! Now she'll last even longer, miserable and lonely, and it's all part of your experiment to you, nothing more. Dennis, how could you?"

He looked straight into my eyes. I saw his mouth move but couldn't hear him above the screams; still, I was sure he said, "You're right."

Then he stood up and headed for the center of the room again. I tried to grab his elbow, to keep him from going to her again, suddenly knowing what he was going to do, but before I could catch his arm, a good-sized paperweight smacked into my left eye. I fell backward, into an armchair, blinking with pain.

As he neared the center, the howling got louder and the lights got brighter. He raised his arms to the figure.

The flow in the room was suddenly soft, almost dim after the harsh glare. She stood in front of him again. "Natalie . . ." He walked straight to her.

She lifted her head, and a smile of such pure joy crossed her face that for one insane second I was elated. Robbins mumbled something as he watched the needles jump and dance. Dennis bent down and kissed her; it seem to go on for hours.

The room went dark. There was a sickening thud as Dennis fell to the floor. I barked both shins getting over the coffee table to him, and I didn't care at all.

Some neighbor must have called the police, because they got there just as I found that his heart was still beating and he was still breathing, though cold as a corpse to the touch. I was shouting, "Get an ambulance" at them before I even knew who they were.

He smiled when I came into the room; that made me feel a lot better. "Looks like Robbins will be able to cover this one up, too," I said, "which is good news for us."

"That's quite a black eye," he said. "Are you all right?"

"Fine. Look, who's in the hospital bed anyway?"

"Yeah." He smiled. "Supposedly they'll let me go tomorrow; if you need anything — "

"I have your spare keys, and my credit cards. I'm fine."

Then we just sat for a long while. Finally he said, "You were right, you know. I think that did it — I don't think she'll appear again. Not even

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from this." He held up the little bracelet. "I woke up for a minute last night, just feeling, I don't know, loved. Warm. I guess it's the last residue — the ghost of a ghost."

"I didn't mean for you to —"

He held up his palms at me. "It was the only way. That or wait a few centuries, I guess."

I nodded. "Yeah. I'm sorry I was so mad at you. You're not really —"

"This wouldn't have happened if I weren't." He looked out the window, away from me. "I'm just trying to act like I'm not."

"You're doing O.K. Can I show you something?"

He shrugged; he was somewhere off inside himself, still looking out the window at the blank grayness of the ventilator shaft. "Come on, I looked at your scrapbook," I added.

Dennis turned and smiled at me. "You have a scrapbook, too?"

"Not exactly." I stood up and took off my shirt. "There are a couple more scars under the bra."

I wanted to look anywhere but at him — but I made myself look into his eyes. "There are so many . . ." He said, "Oh, Kim . . ."

"Do you think you could get used to them?"

He sat right up and hugged me. I hugged back.

And exactly at that moment, a nurse came walking in, took one look, and went charging off to get some authority. It was the funniest thing that had ever happened, as far as we were concerned. We had kissed four or five times before I realized that I wasn't having any trouble.

They made me put my shirt back on and threw me out of the hospital. As I said to Dennis later, when we were driving home, some people have no sense of fun.

"I can't quite figure it out — If the Universe is expanding, should I or should I not invest in real estate?"

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James Patrick Kelly wrote "The F&SF Diet" (March 1984) and "The Last" (June 1985), both fantasies. Here is something completely different from Mr. Kelly, a strong and grim SF story that takes place in a future New York City.

Rat

BY

JAMES PATRICK KELLY

Rat had stashed the dust in four plastic capsules and then swallowed them. From the stinging at the base of his ribs, he guessed they were now squeezing into his duodenum. Still plenty of time. The bullet train had been shooting through the vacuum of the TransAtlantic tunnel for almost two hours now; they would arrive at Port Authority/Koch soon. Customs had already been fixed, according to the maréchal. All Rat had to do was to get back to his nest, lock the smart door behind him, and put the word out on his protected nets. He had enough Algerian Yellow to dust at least half the cerebrums on the East Side. If he could turn this deal, he would be rich enough to bathe in Dom Perignon and dry himself with Gromaire tapestries. Another pang shot down his left flank. Instinctively his hind leg came off the seat and scratched at air.

There was only one problem; Rat had decided to cut the maréchal out. That meant he had to lose the old man's spook before he got home.

The spook had attached herself to him at Marseilles. She braided her blonde hair in pigtails. She had freckles, wore braces on her teeth. Tiny breasts nudged a modest silk turtleneck. She looked to be between twelve and fourteen. Cute. She had probably looked that way for twenty years, would stay the same another twenty if she did not stop a slug first or get cut in half by some automated security laser that tracked only heat and could not read — or be troubled by — cuteness. Their passports said they were Mr. Sterling Jaynes and daughter Jessalynn, of Forest Hills, New York. She was typing in her notebook, chubby fingers curled over

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the keys. Homework? A letter to a boyfriend? More likely she was operating on some corporate database with scalpel code of her own devising.

"Ne fais pas semblant d'étudier, ma petite," Rat said. *"Que fais-tu?"*

"Oh, Daddy," she said, pouting, "can't we go back to plain old English? After all, we're almost home." She tilted her notebook so that he could see the display. It read: "Two rows back, second seat from aisle. Fed. If he knew you were carrying, he'd cut the dust out of you and wipe his ass with your pelt." She tapped the Return key, and the message disappeared.

"All right, dear." He arched his back, fighting a surge of adrenaline that made his incisors click. "You know, all of a sudden I feel hungry. Should we do something here on the train or wait until we get to New York?" Only the spook saw him gesture back toward the fed.

"Why don't we wait for the station? More choice there."

"As you wish, dear." He wanted her to take the fed out *now*, but there was nothing more he dared say. He licked his hands nervously and groomed the fur behind his short, thick ears to pass the time.

The International Arrivals Hall at Koch Terminal was unusually quiet for a Thursday night. It smelled to Rat like a setup. The passengers from the bullet shuffled through the echoing marble vastness toward the row of customs stations. Rat was unarmed; if they were going to put up a fight, the spook would have to provide the firepower. But Rat was not a fighter, he was a runner. Their instructions were to pass through Station Number Four. As they waited in line, Rat spotted the federally appointed vigilante behind them. The classic invisible man: neither handsome nor ugly, five-ten, about one-seventy, brown hair, dark suit, white shirt. He looked bored.

"Do you have anything to declare?" The customs agent looked bored, too. Everybody looked bored except Rat, who had two million new dollars worth of illegal drugs in his gut and a fed ready to carve them out of him.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident," said Rat, "that all men are created equal." He managed a feeble grin — as if this were a witticism and not the password.

"Daddy, please!" The spook feigned embarrassment. "I'm sorry, ma'am; it's his idea of a joke. It's the Declaration of Independence, you know."

The customs agent smiled as she tousled the spook's hair. "I know that, dear. Please put your luggage on the conveyor." She gave a perfunctory glance at her monitor as their suitcases passed through the scanner, and then nodded at Rat. "Thank you, sir, and have a pleasant . . ." The insincere thought died on her lips as she noticed the fed pushing through

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the line toward them. Rat saw her spin toward the exit at the same moment that the spook thrust her notebook computer into the scanner. The notebook stretched a blue finger of point discharge toward the magnetic lens just before the overhead lights novaed and went dark. The emergency backup failed as well. Rat's snout filled with the acrid smell of electrical fire. Through the darkness came shouts and screams, thumps and cracks — the crazed pounding of a stampede gathering momentum.

He dropped to all fours and skittered across the floor. Koch Terminal was his territory. He had crisscrossed its many levels with scent trails. Even in total darkness he could find his way. But in his haste he cracked his head against a pair of stockinged knees, and a squawking weight fell across him, crushing the breath from his lungs. He felt an icy stab on his hindquarters and scrabbled at it with his hind leg. His toes came away wet and he squealed. There was an answering scream, and the point of a shoe drove into him, propelling him across the floor. He rolled left and came up running. Up a dead escalator, down a carpeted hall. He stood upright and stretched to his full twenty-six inches, hands scratching until they found the emergency bar across the fire door. He hurled himself at it, a siren shrieked, and with a whoosh the door opened, dumping him into an alley. He lay there for a moment, gasping, half in and half out of Koch Terminal. With the certain knowledge that he was bleeding to death, he touched the coldness on his back. A sticky purple substance; he sniffed, then tasted it. Ice cream. Rat threw his back his head and laughed. The high squeaky sound echoed in the deserted alley.

But there was no time to waste. He could already hear the buzz of police hovers swooping down from the night sky. The blackout might keep them busy for a while; Rat was more worried about the fed. And the spook. They would be out soon enough, looking for him. Rat scurried down the alley toward the street. He glanced quickly at the terminal, now a black hole in the galaxy of bright holographic sleaze that was Forty-second Street. A few cops with flashlights were trying to fight against the flow of panicky travelers pouring from its open doors. Rat smoothed his ruffled fur and turned away from the disaster, walking crosstown. His instincts said to run, but Rat forced himself to dawdle like a hick shopping for big-city excitement. He grinned at the pimps and windowshopped the hardware stores. He paused in front of a pair of mirror-image sex stops — GIRLS! LIVE! GIRLS! and LIVE! GIRLS! LIVE! — to sniff the pheromone-scented sweat pouring off an androgynous robot shill that was working the sidewalk. The robot obligingly put its hand to Rat's crotch, but he

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pushed it away with a hiss and continued on. At last, sure that he was not being followed, he powered up his wallet and tapped into the transnet to summon a hovercab. The wallet informed him that the city had cordoned off midtown airspace to facilitate rescue operations at Koch Terminal. It advised trying the subway or a taxi. Since he had no intention of sticking an ID chip — even a false one! — into a subway turnstyle, he stepped to the curb and began watching the traffic.

The rebuilt Checker that rattled to a stop beside him was a patchwork of orange ABS and stainless-steel armor. "No we leave Manhattan," said a speaker on the roof light."No we north of a hundred and ten." Rat nodded and the door locks popped. The passenger compartment smelled of chlorobenzylmalononitrile and urine.

"First Avenue Bunker," said Rat, sniffing. "Christ, it stinks back here. Who was your last fare — the circus?"

"Troubleman." The speaker connections were loose, giving a scratchy edge to the cabbie's voice. The locks reengaged as the Checker pulled away from the curb. "Ha-has get a fullsnoot of tear gas in this hack."

Rat had already spotted the pressure vents in the floor. He peered through the gloom at the registration. A slogan had been lased in over it — probably by one of the new Mitsubishi penlights. "Free the dead." Rat smiled: the dead were his customers. People who had chosen the dusty road. Twelve to eighteen months of glorious addiction: synthetic orgasms, recursive hallucinations leading to a total sensory overload and an ecstatic death experience. One dose was all it took to start down the dusty road. The feds were trying to cut off the supply — with dire consequences for the dead. They could live a few months longer without dust, but their joyride down the dusty road was transformed into a grueling marathon of withdrawal pangs and madness. Either way, they were dead. Rat settled back onto the seat. The penlight graffito was a good omen. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a leather strip that had been soaked with a private blend of fat-soluble amphetamines and began to gnaw at it.

From time to time he could hear the cabbie monitoring NYPD net for flameouts or wildcat tolls set up by street gangs. They had to detour to heavily guarded Park Avenue all the way uptown to Fifty-ninth before doubling back toward the bunker. Originally built to protect U.N. diplomats from terrorists, the bunker had gone condo after the dissolution of the United Nations. Its hype was that it was the "safest address in the city." Rat knew better, which is why he had had a state-of-the-art smart door installed. Its rep was that most of the owners' association were can-

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didates either for a mindwipe or an extended vacation on a fed punkfarm.

"Hey, Fare," said the cabbie, "Net says the dead be rioting front of your door. Crash through or roll away?"

The fur along Rat's backbone went erect. "Cops?"

"Letting them play for now."

"You've got armor for a crash?"

"Shit, yes. Park this hack to ground zero for the right fare." The cabbie's laugh was static. "Don't worry, bunkerman. Give those deadboys a shot of old CS gas and they be too busy scratching they eyes out to bother us much."

Rat tried to smooth his fur. He could crash the riot and get stuck. But if he waited, either the spook or the fed would be stepping on his tail before long. Rat had no doubt that both had managed to plant locator bugs on him.

"'Course, riot crashing don't come cheap," said the cabbie.

"Triple the meter." The fare was already over two hundred dollars for the fifteen-minute ride. "Shoot for Bay Two — the one with the yellow door." He pulled out his wallet and started tapping its luminescent keys. "I'm sending recognition code now."

He heard the cabbie notify the cops that they were coming through. Rat could feel the Checker accelerate as they passed the cordon, and he had a glimpse of strobing lights, cops in blue body armor, a tank studded with water cannons. Suddenly the cabbie braked, and Rat pitched forward against his shoulder harness. The Checker's solid rubber tires squealed, and there was the thump of something bouncing off the hood. They had slowed to a crawl, and the dead closed around them.

Rat could not see out the front because the cabbie was protected from his passengers by steel plate. But the side windows filled with faces streaming with sweat and tears and blood. Twisted faces, screaming faces, faces etched by the agonies of withdrawal. The soundproofing muffled their howls. Fear and exhilaration filled Rat as he watched them pass. If only they knew how close they were to dust, he thought. He imagined the dead faces gnawing through the cab's armor in a frenzy, pausing only to spit out broken teeth. It was wonderful. The riot was proof that the dust market was still white-hot. The dead must be desperate to attack the bunker like this looking for a flash. He decided to bump the price of his dust another 10 percent.

Rat heard a clatter on the roof; then someone began to jump up and down. It was like being inside a kettledrum. Rat sank claws into the seat and arched his back. "What are you waiting for? Gas them, damn it!"

"Hey, Fare. Stuff ain't cheap. We be fine — almost there."

A woman with bloody red hair matted to her head pressed her mouth against the window and screamed.

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Rat reared up on his hind legs and made biting feints at her. Then he saw the penlight in her hand. At the last moment Rat threw himself backward. The penlight flared, and the passenger compartment filled with the stench of melting plastic. A needle of coherent light singed the fur on Rat's left flank; he squealed and flopped onto the floor, twitching.

The cabbie opened the external gas vents, and abruptly the faces dropped away from the windows. The cab accelerated, bouncing as it ran over the fallen dead. There was a dazzling transition from the darkness of the violent night to the floodlit calm of Bay Number Two. Rat scrambled back onto the seat and looked out the back window in time to see the hydraulic doors of the outer lock swing shut. Something was caught between them — something that popped and spattered. The inner door rolled down on its track like a curtain coming down on a bloody final act.

Rat was almost home. Two security guards in armor approached. The door locks popped, and Rat climbed out of the cab. One of the guards leveled a burster at his head; the other wordlessly offered him a printreader. He thumbed it, and bunker's computer verified him immediately.

"Good evening, sir," said one of the guards. "Little rough out there tonight. Did you have luggage?"

The front door of the cab opened, and Rat heard the low whine of electric motors as a mechanical arm lowered the cabbie's wheelchair onto the floor of the bay. She was a gray-haired woman with a rheumy stare who looked like she belonged in a rest home in New Jersey. A knitted shawl covered her withered legs. "You said triple." The cab's hoist clicked and released the chair; she rolled toward him. "Six hundred and sixty-nine dollars."

"No luggage, no." Now that he was safe inside the bunker, Rat regretted his panic-stricken generosity. A credit transfer from one of his own accounts was out of the question. He slipped his last thousand-dollar bubble chip into his wallet's card reader, dumped $331 from it into a Bahamian laundry loop, and then dropped the chip into her outstretched hand. She accepted it dubiously: for a minute he expected her to bite into it like they did sometimes on fossil TV. Old people made him nervous. Instead she inserted the chip into her own card reader and frowned at him.

"How about a tip?"

Rat sniffed. "Don't pick up strangers."

One of the guards guffawed obligingly. The other pointed, but Rat saw the skunk port in the wheelchair a millisecond too late. With a wet *plot* the chair emitted a gaseous stinkball that bloomed like an evil flower beneath Rat's whiskers. One guard tried to grab at the rear of the chair, but the old cabbie backed suddenly over

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his foot. The other guard aimed his burster.

The cabbie smiled like a grandmother from hell. "Under the pollution index. No law against sharing a little scent, boys. And you wouldn't want to hurt me anyway. The hack monitors my EEG. I go flat and it goes berserk."

The guard with the bad foot stopped hopping. The guard with the gun shrugged. "It's up to you, sir."

Rat batted the side of his head several times and then buried his snout beneath his armpit. All he could smell was rancid burger topped with sulphur sauce. "Forget it. I haven't got time."

"You know," said the cabbie. "I never get out of the hack, but I just wanted to see what kind of person would live in a place like this." The lifts whined as the arm fitted its fingers into the chair. "And now I know." She cackled as the arm gathered her back into the cab. "I'll park it by the door. They cops say they're ready to sweep the street."

The guards led Rat to the bank of elevators. He entered the one with the open door, thumbed the print-reader, and spoke his access code.

"Good evening, sir," said the elevator. "Will you be going straight to your rooms?"

"Yes."

"Very good, sir. Would you like a list of the communal facilities currently open to serve you?"

There was no shutting the sales pitch off, so Rat ignored it and began to lick the stink from his fur.

"The pool is open for lap swimmers only," said the elevator as the doors closed. "All environments except for the weightless room are currently in use. The sensory deprivation tanks will be occupied until eleven. The surrogatorium is temporarily out of female chassis; we apologize for any inconvenience . . ."

The cab moved down two and a half floors and then stopped just above the subbasement. Rat glanced up and saw a dark gap opening in the array of light diffuser panels. The spook dropped through it.

". . . the holo therapist is off-line until eight tomorrow morning, but the interactive sex booths will stay open until midnight. The drug dispensary . . ."

She looked as if she had been water-skiing through the sewer. Her blonde hair was wet and smeared with dirt; she had lost the ribbons from her pigtails. Her jeans were torn at the knees, and there was an ugly scrape on the side of her face. The silk turtleneck clung wetly to her. Yet despite her dishevelment, the hand that held the penlight was as steady as a jewel cutter's.

"There seems to be a minor problem," said the elevator in a soothing voice. "There is no cause for alarm. This unit is temporarily nonfunctional. Maintenance has been notified and

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is now working to correct the problem. In case of emergency, please contact Security. We regret this temporary inconvenience."

The spook fired a burst of light at the floor selector panel; it spat fire at them and went dark. "Where the hell were you?" said the spook. "You said the McDonald's in Times Square if we got separated."

"Where were *you?*" Rat rose up on his hind legs. "When I got there the place was swarming with cops."

He froze as the tip of the penlight flared. The spook traced a rough outline of Rat on the stainless-steel door behind him. "Fuck your lies," she said. The beam came so close that Rat could smell his fur curling away from it. "I want the dust."

"Trespass alert!" screeched the wounded elevator. A note of urgency had crept into its artificial voice. "Security reports unauthorized persons within the complex. Residents are urged to return immediately to their apartments and engage all personal security devices. Do not be alarmed. We regret this temporary inconvenience."

The scales on Rat's tail fluffed. "We have a deal. The maréchal needs my networks to move his product. So let's get out of here before . . ."

"The dust."

Rat sprang at her with a squeal of hatred. His claws caught on her turtleneck and he struck repeatedly at her open collar, gashing her neck with his long red incisors. Taken aback by the swiftness and ferocity of his attack, she dropped the penlight and tried to fling him against the wall. He held fast, worrying at her and chittering rabidly. When she stumbled under the open emergency exit in the ceiling, he leaped again. He cleared the suspended ceiling, caught himself on the inductor, and scrabbled up onto the hoist cables. Light was pouring into the shaft from above; armored guards had forced the door open and were climbing down toward the stalled car. Rat jumped from the cables across five feet of open space to the counterweight and huddled there, trying to use its bulk to shield himself from the spook's fire. Her stand was short and inglorious. She threw a dazzler out of the hatch, hoping to blind the guards, then tried to pull herself through. Rat could hear the shriek of burster fire. He waited until he could smell the aroma of broiling meat and scorched plastic before he emerged from the shadows and signaled to the security team.

A squad of apologetic guards rode the service elevator with Rat down to the storage subbasement where he lived. When he had first looked at the bunker, the broker had been reluctant to rent him the abandoned rooms, insisting that he live aboveground with the other residents. But all of the suites they showed him were unacceptably open, clean, and unclut-

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tered. Rat much preferred his musty dungeon, where odors lingered in the still air. He liked to fall asleep to the booming of the ventilation system on the level above him, and slept easier knowing that he was as far away from the stink of other people as he could get in the city.

The guards escorted him to the gleaming brass smart door and looked discreetly as he entered his passcode on the keypad. He had ordered it custom-built from Mosler so that it would recognize high-frequency squeals well beyond the range of human hearing. He called to it and then pressed trembling fingers onto the printreader. His bowels had loosened in terror during the firefight, and the capsules had begun to sting terribly. It was all he could do to keep from defecating right there in the hallway. The door sensed the guards and beeped to warn him of their presence. He punched in the override sequence impatiently, and the seals broke with a sigh.

"Have a pleasant evening, sir," said one of the guards as he scurried inside. "And don't worry ab—" The door cut him off as it swung shut.

Against all odds, Rat had made it. For a moment he stood, tail switching against the inside of the door, and let the magnificent chaos of his apartment soothe his jangled nerves. He had earned his reward — the dust was all his now. No one could take it away from him. He saw himself in a shard of mirror propped up against an empty THC aerosol and wriggled in self-congratulation. He was the richest rat on the East Side, perhaps in the entire city.

He picked his way through a maze formed by a jumble of overburdened steel shelving left behind years, perhaps decades, ago. The managers of the bunker had offered to remove them and their contents before he moved in; Rat had insisted that they stay. When the fire inspector had come to approve his newly installed sprinkler system, she had been horrified at the clutter on the shelves and had threatened to condemn the place. It had cost him plenty to buy her off, but it had been worth it. Since then Rat's trove of junk had at least doubled in size. For years no one had seen it but Rat and the occasional cockroach.

Relaxing at last, Rat stopped to pull a mildewed wing tip down from his huge collection of shoes; he loved the bouquet of fine old leather and gnawed and gnawed it whenever he could. Next to the shoes was a heap of books: his private library. One of Rat's favorite delicacies was the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* that he had pilfered from the rare book collection at the New York Public Library. To celebrate his safe arrival, he ripped out page 43 for a snack and stuffed it into the wing tip. He dragged the shoe over a pile of broken sheetrock and past shelves filled with scrap electronics: shattered monitors and

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dead typewriters, microwaves and robot vacuums. He had almost reached his nest when the fed stepped from behind a dirty Hungarian flag that hung from a broken fluorescent light fixture.

Startled, Rat instinctively hurled himself at the crack in the wall where he had built his nest. But the fed was too quick. Rat did not recognize the weapon; all he knew was that when it hissed, Rat lost all feeling in his hindquarters. He landed in a heap but continued to crawl, slowly, painfully.

"You have something I want." The fed kicked him. Rat skidded across the concrete floor toward the crack, leaving a thin gruel of excrement in his wake. Rat continued to crawl until the fed stepped on his tail, pinning him.

"Where's the dust?"

"I . . . I don't . . ."

The fed stepped again; Rat's left fibula snapped like cheap plastic. He felt no pain.

"The dust." The fed's voice quavered strangely.

"Not here. Too dangerous."

"Where?" The fed released him. "Where?"

Rat was surprised to see that the fed's gun hand was shaking. For the first time he looked up at the man's eyes and recognized the telltale yellow tint. Rat realized then how badly he had misinterpreted the fed's expression back at Koch. Not bored. *Empty*. For an instant he could not believe his extraordinary good fortune. Bargain for time, he told himself. There's still a chance. Even though he was cornered, he knew his instinct to fight was wrong.

"I can get it for you fast if you let me go," said Rat. "Ten minutes, fifteen. You look like you need it."

"What are you talking about?" The fed's bravado started to crumble, and Rat knew he had the man. The fed wanted the dust for himself. He was one of the dead.

"Don't make it hard on yourself," said Rat. "There's a terminal in my nest. By the crack. Ten minutes." He started to pull himself toward the nest. He knew the fed would not dare stop him; the man was already deep into withdrawal. "Only ten minutes and you can have all the dust you want." The poor fool could not hope to fight the flood of neuroregulators pumping crazily across his synapses. He might break any minute, let his weapon slip from trembling hands. Rat reached the crack and scrambled through into comforting darkness.

The nest was built around a century-old shopping cart and a stripped subway bench. Rat had filled the gaps in with pieces of synthetic rubber, a hubcap, plastic greeting cards, barbed wire, disk casings, Baggies, a No Parking sign, and an assortment of bones. Rat climbed in and lowered himself onto the soft bed of shredded thousand-dollar bills. The profits of six years of deals and

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betrayals, a few dozen murders, and several thousand dusty deaths.

The fed sniffled as Rat powered up his terminal to notify Security. "Someone set me up some vicious bastard slipped it to me I don't know when I think it was Barcelona . . . it would kill Sarah to see . . ." He began to weep. "I wanted to turn myself in . . . they keep working on new treatments you know but it's not fair damn it! The success rate is less than . . . I made my first buy two weeks only two God it seems . . . killed a man to get some lousy dust . . . but they're right it's, it's, I can't begin to describe what it's like . . ."

Rat's fingers flew over the glowing keyboard, describing his situation, the layout of the rooms, a strategy for the assault. He had overridden the smart door's recognition sequence. It would be tricky, but Security could take the fed out if they were quick and careful. Better risk a surprise attack than to dicker with an armed and unraveling dead man.

"I really ought to kill myself . . . would be best but it's not only me . . . I've seen ten-year olds . . . what kind of animal sells dust to kids . . . I should kill myself and you." Something changed in the fed's voice as Rat signed off. "And you." He stooped and reached through the crack.

"It's coming," said Rat quickly. "By messenger. Ten doses. By the time you get to the door, it should be here." He could see the fed's hand and burrowed into the rotting pile of money. "You wait by the door, you hear? It's coming any minute."

"I don't want it." The hand was so large it blocked the light. Rat's fur went erect and he arched his spine. "Keep your fucking dust."

Rat could hear the guards fighting their way through the clutter. Shelves crashed. So clumsy, these men.

"It's you I want." the hand sifted through the shredded bills, searching for Rat. He had no doubt that the fed could crush the life from him — the hand was huge now. In the darkness he could count the lines on the palm, follow the whorls on the fingertips. They seemed to spin in Rat's brain — he was losing control. He realized then that one of the capsules must have broken, spilling a megadose of first-quality Algerian Yellow dust into his gut. With a hallucinatory clarity, he imagined sparks streaming through his blood, igniting neurons like tinder. Suddenly the guards did not matter. Nothing mattered except that he was cornered. When he could no longer fight the instinct to strike, the fed's hand closed around him. The man was stronger than Rat could have imagined. As the fed hauled him — clawing and biting — back into the light, Rat's only thought was of how terrifyingly large a man was. So much larger than a rat.

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This is a very pukka *story with all the right ingredients: hints of mysterious cults, the robbing of an idol — with time travel thrown in as a bonus.*

Bullivant's Knife

BY
RICHARD MUELLER

The man appeared flailing and fell, sprawled in the dirt, his right hand clutching the knife, his left pouring blood.

I'd known Bullivant for several years before I discovered his secret. He just seemed to be one of those idiotic old-India types that should have died out with the movies, C. Aubrey Smith drinking gin whatchamacallits in Rawalpindi or Cawnpore, gazing longingly at the Khyber Pass and waiting for Britannia to rise from the dead to reclaim her lost empire; smoking steel dreadnoughts, canny administrators, the Brigade of Guards upholding the white-baked towers of the British Raj. In an age of Margaret Thatcher and aluminum frigates burning to the waterline in the South Atlantic, Bullivant was a rara avis indeed. But for most of our association I had no idea just how rara he really was.

I first discovered the old boy in one of the reading rooms of the British Museum, and I was instantly fascinated. I mean, it was a stinking hot day in July, the worst in eight years. *The Times* was blaming it on depletion of the ozone layer, the BBC predicting that it would last into September, and there sat a man wrapped up in enough tweed to turn the blade of a broadsword. I'm an American, and by some standards rude, and I'm afraid that I was staring at him when he looked up.

"Well, umhumph, kaff," he said, like Major Hoople, kaff, just like that. He squinted, fitted a monocle into his right eye, and raised his upper lip above the gum line.

"Ak," he continued, warming up

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his speaking mechanism. "May I, um-hoom, help you with something?"

"Un, no. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to stare."

"Then why did you?" he replied imperiously.

"I was wondering how . . . uh anyone could wear such heavy tweed in this weather."

"Uh, yes," he said, taking out the monocle and buffing it with an immaculate pocket handkerchief. "It is rather warm, is it not?"

I was wearing light cords and a short-sleeved shirt, and still losing sweat at an unprecedented rate. "It's boiling, even in here. How can you stand it? A scorcher like this . . ."

He broke into a grin, which he immediately paved over with his dignified stare. "You're an American!"

"Yes, does it show?"

"Um, no, urrumph. Your speech. Scorcher. Idiomatic, that. Good day."

He returned his attention to the book, closing off the conversation, finis, as if it had never happened. My questions of tweed were to go unanswered. Amazing. I'd had job interviews that were more fluid, but this . . . He was once again absorbed in his reading. Shrugging, I pulled myself away to the research I was doing on Republican Rome. He would be a good story to tell back home.

I saw Bullivant several times in the days that followed (though I did not then know his name), and he was always decked out in his tweed armor, oblivious to the heat that fried London's streets and even penetrated the museum's air conditioning. On a few occasions I nodded, received a beaver-blink in reply, and passed on to my business. It was not until I encountered old Bullivant in a pub near the museum some days later that I again spoke to him.

He was ensconced in a corner booth, buried behind piles of books, a gin fizz stewing at his elbow. The pub was open to the heat beyond its row of fruitlessly turning overhead fans, but Bullivant was still in full uniform. He didn't even look warm.

I had had a worthless day, hunting the wrong references, and, emboldened by a lethal pint of Arthur Guiness, I slid into the opposing seat.

"Your research. How's it going?"

"Ah, the young American! Hot enough for you, eh?"

I likened that it was — obvious, as my shirt was wet-plastered to my body. "You never seem to be affected," I said.

"Um, no. I am, actually. Jolly thing about tweed, doesn't show stain."

"But . . ."

He placed a hand on my arm, favored me with a fatherly smile, and said, "You do feel it, of course. But the important thing is not to show it, don't you know? Sets a bad example."

I had a sudden flash of G. Gordon Liddy, his hand turning to well-done hamburger in the candle flame. Bad

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example? For me?

"Where did you learn that trick?" I asked.

A broad smile, a vague gesture, as if to encompass the Mystic East. "India, I think. I was an administrator, an official of the Crown."

I did some mental arithmetic. India had become independent some forty years ago, and Bullivant did look old enough — barely — to have served in a junior post during World War II. Granted, that made him at least a well-preserved sixty.... "You learned an Indian mental discipline? Yoga?"

Bullivant looked at me as if I had just seriously suggested a trip to the moon on gossamer wing. It made me feel hopelessly American.

"Oh no, dear boy. Nothing of the sort. After all, that would be tantamount to going native. Totally British, I assure you. It was a way of dealing with all situations with dignity, with . . . civilization, don't you know. It was our way."

I saw Bullivant off and on for several weeks, at the museum, at several of the pubs and tearooms in the district, and occasionally on the street. We exchanged pleasantries, asked after each other's work, and discussed our lives in the vaguest generalities. In point of fact, I learned almost nothing at all about David Bullivant. He had served in the Indian Government Service, seen action, lived alone in a flat near the museum, seemed subtly yet almost benevolently racist, was missing his left little finger, and was researching that period of Indian history directly preceding the Sepoy Rebellion, something to do with obscure Hindu cults. I'm sure that he learned much more about me. I'm naturally gregarious, and one of us had to hold up the conversation.

Before I left to return to California, I tried to look him up, but the attendant at the reading room mentioned something about him having gone up to Edinburgh after an obscure book. I left a farewell note for him at the reference desk and boarded a polar flight for home.

Several weeks later, to my great surprise, I received a letter from Bullivant and a hundred pounds in Bank of England notes.

Dear Michael,

So sorry to have missed your departure, but I was up-country doing research that, I fear, has come to naught. Perhaps you, with your access to the markets of occult incunabula available in Los Angeles, could do me a favor. Believe me when I say that it would be most appreciated.

I am looking for a rare book printed in a limited edition in 1824, in Bombay; *The Tvashri Mysteries* by Horace de Bowden. If indeed you are able to locate such a vol-

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ume, I would appreciate your sending it to me by registered post.

Yr. Obdt. Svt.
D. Bullivant

His address followed, the flat near the museum. Christmas break was coming up, I'd had no luck in establishing a relationship, steady or otherwise, with any of the women I liked, and the English sabbatical had busted my savings, making it imperative that I stay in town. A book search might be interesting.

A call to the public library revealed that Tvashri was a Hindu diety devoted to science, technology, magical invention, and the like, so I concentrated my researches, but neither Aleph Books nor the House of Hermetics nor the Bodhi Tree had any knowledge of it. I checked through several rare-book finders and even drove out to The Scene of The Crime on the odd chance that it really was a mystery. I turned up nothing. Then I did what I should have at first. I called up Juli Denner.

When I had come to L.A. years before, Juli was the first woman I had had an affair with. True to Chekhovian formula, when the loving stopped we had become friends. She had since married and our interests had diverged greatly, but we'd stayed in touch. When she had a historical question she couldn't answer, some informational point of reference for an essay or fiction piece, I was the one she called. And Juli was my authority on the occult.

"Michael, I thought you were dead, or in England!"

"Risen from the grave is all. I've been back since October."

"Well, you might have written, or called when you got in . . ."

I accepted the deserved scolding with good grace, waited until she paused, then said, "I'll make it up to you. I'll take you and Robert out to dinner. Something nice and seasonal, like roast goose . . ."

"Robert's in San Francisco on a shoot, but I accept. How about sushi?"

I likened as that sounded seasonal enough to me, and we met at the Ai Gardens that evening.

"The Mysteries of Tvashri?"

"The Tvashri Mysteries," I said around a mouthful of tuna roll. "Ever heard of it?"

Juli tossed back waves of black hair and shook her head. "I've never heard of it, but that doesn't mean I can't find it. In fact, I know someone who may have a copy of it. We can go ask him later, if you like."

It sounded fine to me. "Who is this guy? A collector?"

"In a manner of speaking. It's the baron."

"Really?"

When I had first met Juli, she'd been working in a metaphysical bookstore in Glendale and was deeply in-

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volved in the Los Angeles occult community. She was attending classes with a white Wiccan coven but knew a broad cross section of L.A.'s magic practitioners from the store. One of them was the baron.

I'd never met Comte Adrian de Servain, baron of Hangkow, but I knew from Juli that his magic was not at all white. That it verged far over into the gray. Adrian, a cosmopolitan world citizen, antiquarian, collector, was a notorious homosexual of indeterminate age, though rumor had it that he had been an adviser to the dowager empress of China and had fled after the ascendancy of the Boxer clique put him out of favor in 1905. This strange man was one of the underground curiosities of L.A., and I was going to meet him.

"Just be careful not to antagonize him, Michael. Adrian's crabby around Christmas."

I'll bet. "I'll watch my step."

"Good. He's very powerful. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you."

I hope you appreciate this, Bullivant.

The baron turned out to be the soul of courtesy. After fixing me with an open, appraising stare, he turned to Juli and said, "I will help your friend. His intentions are honorable and serve the cause of research and inquiry." Pretty good, seeing as how Juli had told him only my name. "Besides, my dear, he has bedroom eyes."

Figuring that I was safe with Juli, I followed them inside. Adrian was a short man, lithe and graceful, with a spade beard and wild pointed mustachios. I have never been a believer in the occult (though I respect Juli's commitment and I figure that there must be something to it — she's no dummy), but there was something about Adrian. An aura, a force or magnetism. At one point in the tour of his baroque mansion, wishing me to examine an artifact more closely, he summoned me with a flick of one finger that I very nearly felt the force of. I didn't know what he had, and probably wouldn't want any of it for myself if I did know, but I had no doubts on one score. He *had* it. I wondered what Bullivant would make of him.

Midway through an inspection of Chinese brasses, he turned to me. "Now then, what was it you wanted, Michael?"

"A book. *The Tvashri Mysteries* . . ."

"By de Bowden." His eyes lit up. "Your friend has good taste."

"You know of it?"

"Oh yes. Printed in Bombay in 1824 in a limited edition of five hundred copies. After the printing it was determined by the Christian authorities," and here he licked his lips in an expression of wicked disapproval, "that the book was blasphemous, and all copies were ordered destroyed."

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"Oh," Julie and I said together.

"Or so they thought," he smiled. "One box, of ten copies, had already been shipped to England. I have three of them."

"You do? Would you be willing to sell one of them?" I asked.

"I would. How much did your eccentric friend Bullivant send you to cover this purchase?"

I saw no point in lying. "One hundred pounds."

"Give it to me." He riffled through the bills. "I will take fifty pounds for the book, as I have two others and I do consider it a silly, if interesting piece, but who can tell a man's need? You two may split thirty pounds as a finders' fee and send twenty pounds back to this Bullivant to show him what a good bargain you have made on his behalf. And I trust that this makes everyone happy. Shall we to tea?"

Well, I have no complaints with the Baron," I said as we drove back over the Hollywood Hills.

"He likes you," she said proudly. "That makes a big difference."

"I suppose it does," I said, thinking of the strange little book we had purchased, of which Adrian had had *three* copies. Three of ten. "And if he hadn't? Would he have turned me into a toad?

"That's really not something you want to talk about," she said quietly. "Will you do me a favor?"

"Sure."

"Stay over in the guest room tonight. I want us to go over that book tomorrow, before you send it off."

The experience was disappointing. I stayed in the guest room, which I expected, but the book was a bore. It detailed the rise of a cult of mystics in India during the Napoleonic Wars who worshiped Tvashri, Hindu diety of science. Much of it was obscure and there was an obvious bias, as if de Bowden had actually believed in the cult. There were exhortations to the god, pages of tangled ritual, strange racist diatribes — anti-Muslim and anti-British — meaningless genealogies, and slippery Lovecraft-like references to inner mysteries: a gate of fire, a wheel of nullification, a sword of time, a jeweled crown, talking statues. The entire effect was deranged, like those Nazi fabrications of nonexistent medieval Jewish hate tracts. I shook my head, put the book and twenty pounds in the mail to Bullivant, and promptly forgot the incident.

Four years later I received an invitation to guest-teach at Manchester and, as I was making ready to go, I received a call from Juli.

"You will write this time?"

"Of course I will. I'll be gone a year, teaching. I expect to get quite lonesome."

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"I told Adrian you were going. He asked me to pass you a message."

"Oh?"

"He says he's found out something about Bullivant."

"What?" Bullivant had written to thank me for the book, and we'd exchanged Christmas cards every year since. Always the same: mine with a newsy letter, his with a precise signature.

"Adrian's been researching disappearances. Not just the big ones like Ambrose Bierce and Judge Crater, but the little, obscure ones."

"Sounds like *Close Encounters.*"

"If you like. At any rate, he ran across references to a David Bullivant, a regional magistrate for Lucknow District, who disappeared without a trace in 1842. There was a rumor that he was investigating a cult — unspecified, but Adrian is sure it was Tvashri — at the time he vanished."

I laughed. "I just saw *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom.* It's pretty farfetched, but there were some bad groups loose then. There really was a Kali cult of stranglers. That David Bullivant's probably been in an unmarked grave for 140 years. My Bullivant's a wacko, or a coincidence. Or a relative investigating the disappearance of an ancestor."

"That's what I said," Juli replied, her voice distant and tinny over the phone, "but Adrian brought up one disturbing point. The worshipers of Tvashri believed that they could travel through time."

"Yeah?"

"That's what he said." The sword of time? "You going to look up Bullivant when you get there?"

"Well, I'll have a week in London before I go up-country." Bullivant's phrase, I remembered. "Sure, might as well."

"Then be careful, please."

Be careful. I dozed off on the plane and awoke to a frightening apparition, but it was only the in-flight movies. I put on a headset, got a new Al Stewart tape, and read. Nonsense, I thought. But after I'd checked into my hotel, I went straight to Bullivant's flat.

"Yes? My word, the American! Do come in."

His flat was small; what we'd call "cozy", the English "comfortably appointed." The decor was Indian, probably scrounged from Paki import and antique shops, but nice stuff all the same. The library was filled with books on India, the Colonial Service, Victorian Britain, and a smaller section of modern reference: maps, political science texts, Michelin guides, newspaper yearbooks. A stack of *Guardian*s was growing beside the sofa.

Bullivant made tea and pumped me for information concerning my past four years, nodding, commenting sparsely, encouraging me to talk. At first I thought he had changed, had

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opened up and become more communicative. And then I realized what he was doing. As long as I talked, he didn't have to say anything, the old fox. I decided on a frontal attack and waited for him to issue one of his brief comments.

"Bullivant, tell me about the Sword Time."

He stopped, looked at me curiously, and for a moment I expected that I'd blown it. Then the color drained from his face and he stammered, "Y-you know?"

"I know some of it," I said. "I know that a David Bullivant disappeared near Lucknow in 1842. I know that he was a magistrate, investigating the Cult of Tvashri" (I was on a roll and guesses were permissible), "and that his disappearance was ascribed to cult activity. Correct?"

"Yes," he said heavily. "You now know almost as much as I do."

"What?"

"It's not as simple as it appears. What you have guessed, what I have discovered, may indeed be correct, but I can't prove it. I have no memory."

I stared at him, and he smiled sheepishly. "Perhaps I should tell you what I do remember.

"I . . . came to, I suppose you could call it, six years ago, near the village of Swatuck, India. I was squatting on the ground, or rather sprawling, as though I had fallen a short distance. I was wearing a tattered set of peasant rags. I was holding an odd knife in my right hand, and the little finger of my left hand" — he held it up to display the missing digit — "was newly severed and bleeding. There was blood on the knife.

"I bound my hand and took stock. I realized, with a start, that I had no memory of anything, anything at all. Oh, I knew what a knife was, how to bandage my hand, everything basic. And, upon inspection, I found a leathern pouch under my clothing. A pocket watch indicated that my name was David Bullivant, that I had graduated from somewhere in 1810, and that my mother had given me the watch. Beyond that I had only a knowledge of things and my ability to use the language."

"My God," I said. "How did you survive? This is a complex world, complex and expensive."

He nodded, affirming my statement. "Happily, I am possessed of a greater-than-average intelligence. It was not easy, but I learned of radios and aircraft and science and history. Wars. The defeat of our empire. I caught up, you might say."

"But . . ."

"Money? Oh, that's right. That really could have been a problem, but, you see, my pockets were filled to the brim with jewels."

When my breath returned, I blurted. "You robbed a temple."

"Yes, I know. I must have, back in 1842. But how did I get here?"

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"The Sword of Time? Do you have it?"

He rose and moved toward the kitchen, beckoning me to follow. The room was modern, with the latest conveniences, but there were a good number of Victorian tea-strainers and other obsolete appurtenances hanging from pegs over the sink. I imagine that Bullivant had found them in antique shops and was using them instinctively.

He stopped before the sink.

"Bloody hell," he exclaimed, sweeping a pile of carrot sticks into the trash. "I'm getting sloppy." He reached up into a cabinet and took down a pasteboard box. From the box came a cloth bundle that he lifted out and placed on the table. It was perhaps eighteen inches long.

"The sword? That?"

"Yes."

He unwrapped it to reveal a long knife of unusual design with a dark carven handle. The design on the grip approximated without delineating strange faces, bodies, limbs, eyes, and here and there bits of an unknown script, linked with an overhead bar.

"Did you try for a translation?"

"Yes. Nothing. It's too old, too primitive. It predates all of the cultures we have any knowledge of. But look here, at the blade. Have you ever seen anything like this?"

From an infinitesimal point, the blade grew until it was almost two inches wide at the tang. The wide back tapered down uniformly to a cutting edge that expanded from the point until it had changed into a thick wedge. I wouldn't have designed a blade like it. It looked vastly inefficient, and I said so.

"It is," Bullivant said. "For cutting. It doesn't cut, not quite. Look here."

He upended the blade. There was a dark stain splashed upon the base of the wedge, blood, which I assumed to be Bullivant's from six years previous, but the bizarre thing was the cutting edge itself.

Like a string of tiny imploding diamonds, light wavered on the blade. I could not actually see the edge, for it would not stay still for me to focus upon, but seemed to collapse and expand like those afterimages that flood the eyelids when you close them tightly.

That's it," he said. "What is it, do you know?"

"I think the more important question is, Where is it?" I mumbled. "It's not here."

"Then where?"

"I don't know. Another universe maybe."

Bullivant rubbed his eyes, as if trying to put aside the reality/unreality of what he was seeing, then said, "it gives me a headache. I'm going to call it a night. Will you come tomorrow?"

I spent the day in the library, cross-referencing Time Travel with Science/

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Fantasy. I dabbled in a lot of very strange literature and wound up understanding none of it. At dusk I picked up the makings for a salad and hamburgers, and trudged up to Bullivant's flat.

He was sitting in the kitchen, the knife before him, its psychedelic cutting edge covered with a cloth.

"Bullivant, what did you mean when you said that the knife didn't cut?"

"It doesn't. Here, I'll show you." He slid it out from under the cloth and carried it to the drainboard. Then, placing his hand flat upon the countertop, he readied the knife above it.

"What are you doing?" I cried.

"Watch closely." He lowered the knife until it was bisecting his hand, passing halfway through it. There was no blood, and when he lifted the knife away, there was no sign of a wound.

"But how . . . ?"

"I don't know. But, were I to pass the knife completely through my hand . . ."

"What would happen?" I asked, my voice in a whisper.

Bullivant shrugged. "I'm not sure, but I can give you a demonstration. Hand me one of those tomatoes you brought." He placed the fruit carefully on the drainboard and poised the knife above it. "Again, watch this very closely. This is quite sudden."

He lowered the knife halfway through the tomato, then pulled it back. Again, no wound and no mark upon the blade. Then he sank the blade through the fruit, but when it reached the other side, the tomato —instantaneously and without sound — vanished.

"Where'd it go?" I asked, when my voice returned.

He shrugged. "It just goes. Into the past. Into the future. Away. In some way this must've been what happened to me."

"May I try that?"

He handed me the weapon with an admonition to be careful. It was almost weightless. I recalled that many people connected with the study of magic believed that so-called magical artifacts extended into parallel planes or universes, and that most of their substance, mass, weight was not of the earth. Indeed, it was this otherworldly connection that supposedly gave these items their power. The Sword of Time seemed like a good candidate for this theory. I took a bundle of carrot sticks from the bag and held the knife, just the tip, above them in the middle. As the point of the blade moved through them, they too, disappeared. Wow, I thought insufficiently. If a use could be found for such a tool, which sent halves of things into the future. . . . The future?

"Bullivant, quickly. Did you throw away a bunch of carrot sticks yesterday when I was here? Remember?"

"Yes, I did," he said testily. "That's not like me, to leave vegetable wastes

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out for the ants."

"You didn't, I did." I explained what I had done.

"But the things I cut never reappear. Have appeared."

"Perhaps it was something to do with the width of the blade. I cut them with the thinnest part, the tip end. That bloodstain on the blade. Is that yours?"

"Yes, I think so. I believe that is how I got here, and it is at the wide part of the blade. Surely you don't think . . ."

I prepared dinner, and we talked into the night. If the left side of the blade sent objects into the past, and the right side into the future, then, when he had severed his left pinkie, it had likewise materialized somewhere in the vicinity of 1700, provided of course that an object's weight was not a factor. And it explained why the bloodstain was only on the right side of the blade. Blood from the left side had been catapulted into the past, while the knife had gone forward because Bullivant had been holding it. Time travel on the bootstrap principle.

Based on this theory, Bullivant reasoned that if he held the knife in his left hand and cut off his right pinkie, he should be propelled back toward his own time, provided of course that he positioned the bloodstain directly over his finger.

"But why? Was your own time so much better than this? I'd have thought you'd be used to this by now."

"I am," he said running his fingers over the bookshelf. "The 1840s were primitive. We know so much more now. It hasn't been easy to get this far . . ."

He stopped then; and soon after, I returned to my hotel. I was awakened next morning by the phone.

"Yes?"

"Michael, David Bullivant. Would you do me a few favors?"

"Of course, so long as I can do them in the next few days. Saturday I'm heading up to Manchester."

"Quite. No, I just need you to pick up a few packages for me." He named Fortnum and Mason's and two other stores I was not familiar with, then: "And two other things. This may sound strange, but please bear with me."

I thought back to our first meeting in the British Museum and doubted he would be able to surprise me, but he did. "I'd like you to write up a brief account of our association — include all the details, please — sign it and date it. As if you were explaining to someone who knew neither of us. Leave nothing out. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I think so. And the other thing?"

"Buy a book, inscribe it to me, sign it and date it."

"A book?"

"Yes, any book."

"Look, you're not planning any-

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thing dangerous, are you?" I said, suddenly afraid that our strange association was coming to an end, that I might lose the odd old duck.

"No, no. Just an experiment. If you could pick all that up for me and drop round tomorrow at say, eight-ish, I'll explain everything.

I did as he asked. Bullivant was waiting for me, dressed in his usual tweed suit. He accepted the packages, the book, and the manuscript that I had typed up that afternoon. He skimmed the first page and chuckled.

"'Idiotic old-India-types.' Yes, I suppose that we were in a way, holding on to the past when we should have been seizing the future. Yes, this is good. . . . It will give me something to remember you by."

"I'm sorry about that," I said, embarrassed, "but I wanted to catch a good picture of you."

"Oh, I'm sure you have. I shall treasure this," he said, tucking it into his coat pocket, then fell to unwrapping the parcels. I stepped back, watching the items I'd collected emerge from the rubble. A knapsack, a first-aid kit, medical supplies and antibiotics, an automatic pistol, ammunition, three books — the titles of which I missed as he packed everything away, then hoisted the knapsack onto his back. The book I had brought went into his coat pocket.

"You're going to do it, aren't you?"

"I must, Michael. I've seen your time and mine, and I realize that the future can't be left to take care of itself. But, I assure you, your help will not have gone unappreciated, not with luck, and luck favors the prepared mind."

He hefted the knife awkwardly in his left hand, and gestured toward the bookcase. There was a tape recorder running that I had not seen before. "For the permanent record," Bullivant said. "Posterity and all that." He smiled gently. "I shall miss you, Michael Hull."

"And I, you. But tell me one thing. The books, the ones in the package. What are they?"

He laughed, that great beaver-toothed guffaw. "You'll find out, or, if you don't, it won't matter. Good-bye."

And he was gone.

I stepped to the phone and punched through to our London office. Five years ago, and still like a dream. The director of Bullivant's at my door, the trip to London, the visit to the legendary vault under the Welsh coast, reputedly designed by Bullivant himself. There I was allowed to view the strangest collection of artifacts in the possession of mankind: a knapsack, a glass-encased knife, a copy Wells' *The Time Machine* with my signature, and a crackling and yellowed manuscript. And the books, the books I had brought to Bullivant, the books he had taken with him to

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1853. The books that had turned the Industrial Revolution into the Technocultural Renaissance: *The Way Things Work* in two volumes, and *The Timetables of History*. The blueprints for the Great Age of Man, with Bullivant International in the forefront of every aspect of it. What would it have been like without him? Without me, for that matter?

"London Central. This is Director Hull."

"Yes, Director."

"The rest of the carrots have arrived. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Director."

"Good. Now send a shuttle, please. I have a flight to catch."

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Larry Tritten offers a fresh and entertaining twist on the notion of a radio that is tuned in on the future . . .

Turning Off

BY
LARRY TRITTEN

Because he was unable to resist an authentic bargain, Mandel was quick to notice the handsome FM-AM radio with a five-dollar price tag appended the day it appeared in the window of the pawn shop he passed each morning on his way to work. Since he had recently swept his own radio off an end table and smashed it beyond repair while practicing solitary entrechats in his tiny, cramped studio apartment, he went into the pawn shop to have a look at the machine.

The man behind the counter was small and hairless, with the exception of great ursine eyebrows lurking above a carefully premeditated blank stare. Driving a fistful of knuckles into a massaging palm, he squandered a lavish smile and said,"May I help you?"

Fearing that he was about to be assaulted with a salvo of professional high-pressure sales talk, Mandel muttered, "Just looking," darted a furtive glance around the glittering confines of the shop, and took up an oblique position at the far end of the counter, where he pretended to study with mild interest a display of old-fashioned jeweled stickpins. But shortly he braced himself for encounter, sidled back toward the clerk, and asked candidly, "What's wrong with the five-dollar radio?"

Eyebrows quailing, the man snapped, "Something should be wrong with a good buy?"

"It must be a seventy-dollar piece," Mandel pointed out suspiciously.

"Seventy-five, and you can check. Also, there's nothing wrong, too. A buy is a buy. Isn't it?"

"I don't know," Mandel hedged.

The man fetched the radio from

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the window and set it on the counter, caressing the top with a gentle touch. Mandel noticed that the radio sported a brand name with which he was unfamiliar: Providence. "A buy is a buy," the clerk repeated. He turned on the radio, and a young woman's voice, clear and resonant, issued from the speaker: ". . . once I would like to have someone love me for myself and not because I'm easy."

"You want to stand here and test this," the man said to Mandel, "just go ahead. I'm not pushy. I'll be down there at the end of the counter polishing old pennies . . ."

"Never mind, I'll take it," said Mandel, reaching for his wallet. It was his style to act by impulse when the mood was upon him.

That night, after supper, Mandel removed the radio from the Woolworth's shopping bag in which it had been wrapped, set it on his kitchen table, and turned it on. He was in the mood for Beethoven symphonies, but would settle for Bach. The radio hummed warmly, lights vaguely perceived through chinks in its frame glowed dimly, but it remained silent. Mandel kept turning the tuning dial in brisk arcs without luck, and was almost ready to give up when a frail elderly voice murmured through the speaker, "I shouldn't go up in these things. My heart isn't top-notch anymore, and I never did care for heights, anyway." A teenage girl's excited voice abruptly replied, "Oh, *c'mon*, Grandpa, you'll love it. Wait'll you get a *look* at things from up there." The old man responded with a chuckle and said, though a little hesitantly, "Well, I'll try anything once, honey. Didn't I take two bad ones in the head at Château-Thierry? O.K., let's go. Here, you get the tick—"

Angrily, Mandel twirled the dial in search of another station. "Where's Beethoven?" he asked the tabletop. But there were no other stations. In exasperation, he switched back to AM, but found nothing there. Then he returned to the single station once more.

"I . . . I don't feel well," the old man was saying. His voice was a reedy crackle, ominous. "We're up . . . so high . . ."

Mandel snapped the radio off with an irritable gesture. "What kind of number is this?" he muttered indignantly to the floor. He went to the newspaper and found that no dramatic programs were scheduled that evening; then, scowling, turned on the radio again. A dense, beefy voice was saying, "Hey, May, hand me out a couple them rags and I'll get the outside of this window." There was the sound of someone crossing a room, deliberate feminine clicking of heels, then a woman's alarmed cry: "For God's sake, Harry, get off of that ledge! You'll break your neck!" A loud eruption of dismissive male laughter. "I'm O.K., now just hand me—"

With a sigh, Mandel switched off

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the radio and stood staring at it with baleful intent. "I give up on you," he told the unpredictable machine. "If you don't shape up tomorrow, back you go."

An ultimatum.

At work the following day, Mandel found it difficult to concentrate effectively on his job, that of a writer of story continuity for a comic book magazine called *Psychotic Tales*. Halfway through a tale about a timorous accountant who decorates his apartment with viscera gleaned from various individuals who at one time or another had slighted him, his mind balked and all he could think about was his new radio. He considered leaving his cubicle and straying next door to the art department with his odd story, but finally decided he would only garner perplexed gazes. Returning to his work, he managed to muster enough imagination to bring the accountant to justice in a fashion both grisly and poetic. At five o'clock, as usual, he took the bus home.

Someone had discarded a newspaper in the seat Mandel chose to sit in and, to kill time, he picked it up and glanced absently through its pages. Two stories, relegated to the obscurity of the back page of the classified ads section, caught his attention.

WORLD WAR I HERO DIES

Irving J. Dander, 83, of 3583 Coy Drive, Sherman Oaks, suffered a fatal heart attack yesterday while riding the Ferris wheel at Disneyland with his twelve-year-old granddaughter, Melinda, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. George Dander of Pasadena. Police officer Gordon Morris, who was on the scene, said that Dander was already dead when he was taken from the Ferris wheel.

Dander, a corporal with the AEF during World War I, distinguished himself during the battle of Château-Thierry by leading an attack against the enemy in spite of two severe head wounds. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the French Croix de Guerre for the action.

and

FATAL PLUNGE FROM WINDOW

A 49-year-old North Hollywood truck driver fell to his death from the third-story ledge of his apartment late yesterday while attempting to clean a window.

Police said that several persons witnessed the accident that took the life of Walford Dow of 6911 Fulton Avenue. Dow was killed instantly by the fall. His wife said that he had just returned from work and had suddenly decided to clean a dirty window that had been annoying him for several days.

Mandel folded the newspaper and

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tucked it under his seat. During the remainder of the bus ride, he sat staring out the window, lips pinched into a motionless pout. By the time he got off the bus, he was humming "Tea for Two" under his breath to keep his mind from staggering to extravagant and dispiriting conclusions.

He ate a glum TV dinner in his apartment and, when he had finished, tried to focus his attention on a book about improvisational religions by a Georgetown University theologian, but before half an hour had passed he was at the radio, tuning in on a conversation between a man named Elmore and a woman named Tonia.

"Look, Tonia, you want a mark on the face, I'll provide it," Elmore bellowed in a tone edged with indignation.

The woman made a crazed snorting sound. "You slap me, Elmore, I'll slap you right back, so help me God!"

"Baby, I tell ya, I'll break your lips if you don't shut the hell up!"

"I'm not afraid of you, lover boy!"

Mandel twisted his features into an expression of ornate bafflement, sat upright rigidly, and quickly snapped off the radio, hearing, in the same moment, a strident pealing of braked tires like a frenzied scream in the background just before the voices were cut short. He gazed at the radio for a moment, then turned it back on and tried to tune in other stations. There were none. After pacing aimlessly around the apartment for a while, he sat down and called one of the popular local radio stations.

"Something weird is going on here," he told the man. "I just get voices on my radio, no music."

"There's music," the man assured him. "Try harder."

Mandel hung up, then made similar calls to two other stations, getting similar answers.

The next night, on his way home from work, he bought a newspaper. Taking a seat in the back of the bus, he opened the paper reluctantly. On page 28, beside an ad for imported margarine, he read:

MAN AND WIFE KILLED IN HIT-AND-RUN ACCIDENT

A married couple from Council Bluffs, Iowa, Elmore A. Baum, 51, and his wife, Tonia, 46, were both killed instantly yesterday night when struck by a hit-and-run motorist at the intersection of Hollywood and Vine Street.

A confectionery design specialist, Raymond Nolde, 35, of Long Beach, witnessed the accident. He told police that he had just left a bar when he saw a car plunge through a red light and strike the Baums as they were crossing the street. Nolde said it was too sudden for him to make out the model of the car or the number of its license plate.

"Coincidence," whispered Mandel to himself, closing the newspaper. But his cheeks paled considerably

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and he slumped down in his seat, turning to fix his blitzed vision on anything other than the newspaper wilting in his hand.

When he got home he put the radio on a shelf in the back of a closet and forced all thoughts of it out of his mind. He spent the evening reading about an aboriginal tribe in the hinterlands of Ecuador who worshipped the multiplication table, and watching a television talk-show host conduct a seminar on the international deaf-mute hand-signal alphabet with three gesticulative guests. When the talk show was over, he took a sleeping pill and went to bed.

The pill, however, failed to work, and after two interminable sleepless hours, Mandel was up and on his way to the closet. Hesitating only momentarily, he turned on the radio.

". . . cop says one more word, I'm going to carve him," concluded a youthful male voice bitter with anger. "Easy, Romero, boy, easy," cautioned a tranquil older voice.

"Don't tell me *easy*, Benny, goddamn it! You want to taste steel yourself?"

"Crazy, crazy," muttered Mandel, blotting sweat from his forehead with the back of a hand. He reached to turn off the radio, but a sense of vertigo swept through him and his hand faltered. He eased down the volume dial so that the radio was silent, though still on, then rushed into the bedroom, dressed, and fled from the apartment. It was a windy and starless night, and Mandel walked several blocks, aimlessly, before finally hauling up beneath the blinking incandescent neon sign of a neighborhood bar called the D BOONE KILLED A BAR. Inside, the decor was frontier style, and he took a seat in a corner booth under the shelved figure of a dusty stuffed raccoon and ordered gin and tonic from a girl wearing an abbreviated gingham dress with deep décolletage and a black silk sunbonnet tilted atop her New Wave coiffure at a rakish angle. After three lingering drinks he got up and left, just as a group of feathered and buckskin-clad Indians came milling into the place, and returned to his apartment.

Mandel tickled the radio's volume dial uncertainly with a forefinger.

". . . cop can lay *that squip on me!*" Romero's voice shrilled, out of control.

"No, no, no, not for real," Mandel chanted. He felt an apoplectic surge in his chest. With icy deliberation, he switched off the radio.

The next morning, like stalked prey, he slinked into his cubicle and dropped into the chair behind his desk. His hands were unsteady, his stomach amok.

Before he could get to work, he was interrupted by a fragile birdlike character in a dark suit who rushed headlong into the cubicle and dipped his head in brief greeting, blurting, "Here I am. Sort of like the voice of

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your conscience, but don't worry, you're off the hook. We'll overlook the old guy, the window washer and the couple from Council Bluffs, although you should have known better after those first two, and *did* deep down inside. None of them were really due yet, you know. Well, anyway, all I want is the radio, and here's the five-spot it set you back." The man made a quick ruffling gesture and fluttered a five-dollar bill out of his pocket.

"What I really want is an explanation," Mandel said, his heart suddenly burgeoning against his chest.

"Don't be cute," the man said. "Try and see my side. We can't have those things out among the public. Control would bitch. Oh, I'm not saying they haven't gone out before. It gets awfully dull out there with nothing to do but turn dials, and Control's not humorless — sometimes he gives us a day or two in someplace like Hungary or the Bermuda Triangle with carte blanche — but anything we bring with us, we take back. That's standard pro. Now, I don't know how that radio got—"

"I don't like this," Mandel cut in. "Can't you clarify it? How do I know who you are?"

The man frowned. "That's gratitude. You ease someone off the hook, and right away they want a crash course in metaphysics."

"I just want to know more."

"Are you coming across, Mandel?" the man said, waving the bill.

"I just want to know more," Mandel persisted. He was beginning to sweat, but had struck a stubborn stance.

"I'm not going to coerce you," said the man, turning, and hurried out of the cubicle.

At five that afternoon, Mandel bought a paper and stood on a street corner glancing shakily through its pages. He found the headline on the second page:

POLICE OFFICER MURDERED

He didn't bother to read the story. With a gelatinous stride, he made his way to the bus and rode home in silence.

That night at seven the doorbell chimed. When he opened the door, the birdlike man flew quickly into the apartment. "I'm crazy, but I'll give you ten bucks," he said. "Come on, now, fork it over. You're getting scared and don't want to get involved and you're screwing up organization badly. Take this." He thrust the ten into Mandel's hand. Mandel stared inattentively at the money.

"I want to, but I can't," he told the man. "Look, I've been doing some thinking. I think I'm going to bring the police in on this. I don't know yet, but why should I listen to you? How do I know who you are? Show me your credentials."

The other began to hum "How You Going to Keep 'Em Down on the

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Farm" while studying Mandel closely and shaking his head. "Christ, Mandel," he said, "you're being downright silly, and deep down inside you *know* it. I told you we're full of tricks. But if that's the way you want it . . ."

Mandel had an impulse to whirl about, seize the radio, and shove it into his visitor's arms, saying, "Here, take it, take it, I'm sorry," but instead he stood mutely, shoulders slack.

"That's it," said the man. Turning, he whisked abruptly out of the apartment, humming "Thanks for the Memories."

The next morning, before going to work, Mandel confronted his image in the mirror and said, "It doesn't matter that I may have a million-dollar gadget. When I get home tonight, I'm taking the damned thing straight to the police."

His reflection regarded him skeptically.

"Well," he retorted, "I am!"

Arriving at his office, Mandel assaulted his work with rigidly programmed detachment. He worked straight through his lunch hour, even disdaining coffee breaks. The day passed so quickly that when he rose from his desk, after having produced two complete stories, he saw that he had worked nearly an hour overtime. It was almost six. Slipping on his coat, he said absently, "Now for that other deal . . ."

In the elevator he greeted Hanks, one of the artists, a lean, splay-featured man who drew a regular feature called Grave Rat. "Work late?" Mandel asked.

Hanks nodded, then broke into a smile. "Hey, man, what's this actor bit? You breaking into show biz, Mandel?"

"Huh?" Mandel said, noticing for the first time that Hanks held a small compact FM radio in one hand.

"Very thoughtful of you," Hanks said, indicating the radio with a nod. "Just before most of us left the office, your guy came in and distributed the radios and told us about the program. Nobody even knew!"

As the elevator doors sighed open and both men stepped into the lobby, Mandel suddenly did a flawless and grandiose pirouette, whirling in midglide to grasp Hanks' arms and gasp, "What, *what?* No, *no* . . ."

Hanks recoiled, and Mandel spun around in a tight circle in the lobby, twisting his body in a series of panicky shuffling leaps and bawling, as realization enveloped him, ". . . no, no, no!"

And then someone, somewhere, decided that he was not nearly as interesting as the late afternoon reruns of *Bonanza*, and shut him off.

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John Brunner offers a new story from his character, Mr. Secrett: a story that begins with a contemporary performance of Hamlet and then goes back to World War II and a man whose life parallels a great legend...

The Man Who Was A Legend in His Own Time

BY
JOHN BRUNNER

In order to keep body and soul together, writers like yours truly have to take whatever is offered, whether in cash or in kind.

In this case what came my way was a free ticket to an experimental theater whose new, allegedly revolutionary production of *Hamlet* was being studiously ignored by all the national daily papers and most of the weeklies, apart from the one whose editor said I could go in his place provided I phoned in a review afterward — only I'd better make up my mind fast because his press day was Thursday and the final performance was scheduled for Saturday.

Well, it had been a long while since I'd been able to afford an evening out. I accepted the ticket and mentally entered it on the "soul" side of the ledger.

The production — at a disused church in the uncharted wilds of South London — rather surprised me. I'd grown bored with the exaggerated claims of ambitious young directors all of whom imagined themselves to be the new Ken Russell, but this *Hamlet* did in fact add an ingenious twist to the plot. The Ghost wasn't Hamlet's father back from the dead (thereby tidily solving that annoying contradiction about "the bourne from which no traveller returns") but a young soldier, standing guard on the battlements in the opening scene, who had witnessed the murder in the garden and was too terrified to describe what he'd seen except in an autohypnotic trance, during which he spoke in the deep voice of a much older man.

This struck me as justifiable, though I didn't entirely concur with the rivalry between this boy-soldier and

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Ophelia for Hamlet's favors that was introduced via a lot of complicated business in a dumb show. That made the play longer than ever; consequently curtain-up was so early I'd had to leave home without a proper meal. I confess that during the last act I was chiefly concerned about whether I was going to escape before they shut the fish-and-chip shop I'd noticed on my way from the bus stop. In any case I had to phone in my review before midnight.

Into the bargain, smoking was banned in the theater, and since I'd had nothing to eat, I badly needed a cigarette.

I wasn't alone. At ten to eleven the audience rose as one and surged out, leaving the cast disconsolate for lack of curtain calls, and the matches being struck by smokers in the dark void made our exodus look like a brief torchlight procession succeeded by an infestation of fireflies.

On the way to the fish-and-chipper, I drafted my review in my head, planning to note it down while gobbling my food, and find a phone early enough to impress Mr. Editor with my devotion to duty. Fat chance!

For while I was struggling toward the counter, a hand fell on my shoulder and a voice boomed, "Well, well, well! Scrivener, of all people! Fancy meeting you here!"

I didn't fancy it in the least.

But I had to turn and bestow a sickly smile on the man who qualifies as my oldest friend. I don't mean that in the affectionate sense, only the chronological one.

Over the racket as people shouted orders to the harassed cooks, I bellowed, "What's yours?"

"Fillet of plaice, if I may!" He snapped his fingers and pointed, and miraculously I became the next customer to rate attention. I remember thinking as I forked over the cash and reached for the salt and vinegar, "If only he would use these tricks like that on his own behalf . . . !"

But maybe he's not allowed to. I never know what to think about Mr. Secrett.

"So what brings you to the middle of nowhere?" he inquired as we emerged into the cool night air. Around a nearby yard there was a low wall that people were using for a bench, and we managed to claim two adjacent places as a courting couple moved elsewhere.

Once installed, I explained.

"I see . . ." He brushed salt from his gray mustache. "What's going to be the — ah — *drift* of your review?"

It had all been clear in my mind a moment before, but under his sardonic gaze I found my conviction as to its excellence dissolving.

"Well . . . ah . . ."

"Pull yourself together, old man! Your editor deserves something from you, even if your ticket was buckshee!

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Have you seen many other *Hamlets*?"

"Half a dozen, I suppose," I answered. "And the films, of course: Olivier's and Smoktunovsky's."

"Yes. Ye-esss . . . I suppose I must have seen fifty or sixty. There's something so *inexhaustible* about the plot, isn't there? It's among the archetypal stories that encapsulate the human condition: jealousy, lust for power, indecision, the working out of an inevitable doom . . . . Has it ever struck you how frightful it must be to realize that your own life is paralleling one of the great legends, and there's no escape from the pattern? As a matter of fact, the finest *Hamlet* London never saw involved somebody in precisely that plight."

I said rather sourly, "Though London didn't see it, I suppose you did?"

"I had that good fortune. Care to hear about it?"

At that point I had the chance to rise and say I wasn't interested because all I wanted was to seek privacy, draft my review, and phone it in.

Mr. Secrett being Mr. Secrett, I did nothing of the kind. I sat back and went on eating cod and chips.

You are, of course (said Mr. Secrett), considerably too young ever to have seen a performance by Alex Orme. He was one of many promising young men during the thirties whose career was interrupted by the war just when it was approaching its climax.

He came from a wealthy, possibly a titled background, though some mystery surrounded his origins, and he gave the impression of trying to live them down. It was known that he had led a somewhat lonely childhood, spent mainly with relatives rather than his parents, but he was sent to a well-known school and eventually to Cambridge. That was where he discovered a talent, a taste for acting.

He also learned how to exploit his impressive physical endowments in other ways. He was a striking chap, tall, with curly red hair, green eyes, and a fine resonant voice, and this combination rendered him attractive to a number of women somewhat his senior, whom one suspects he pursued at least partly owing to want of affection on the part of his natural mother, of whom he seldom spoke. The fact that he failed to complete his degree-course was not wholly unconnected with the — ah — *evitable* consequences of his liaison with a lady of distinguished lineage whose husband had decided several years before that they already had enough children. Being twice Alex's age, she ought to have known better how to "conduct her affairs," as it were. However, the scandal blew over and young Alex departed for London and a place at drama school.

His inamorata, whom I shall call Lady Maud because it wasn't her name, arranged for the child to be adopted and subsequently resumed the rela-

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tionship in a more discreet fashion. Enjoying a personal fortune, she invested considerable sums in her protégé, first during his studies and then by backing a number of moderately successful plays that featured him as what one used to term a matinee idol.

Without being an active ingrate, however, Alex disappointed her. The Depression set in; there followed the Spanish Civil War, accompanied by a ferment of idealism in intellectual circles, much of it frankly left-wing. During the McCarthy period in America, they coined the phrase "prematurely antifascist" for those who imagined that communism offered the only viable alternative to the menacing rise of belligerent nationalism exemplified by the Nazis, the Iron Guard, and other extremist movements, and one could well have applied it to Alex and those with whom he became associated. Rejecting the mannered style of the London theater of the day, they sought inspiration from Brecht and Stanislavsky. It wasn't long before Alex was turning his back on the bright lights of the West End and declaring that what was needed was a People's Theater.

His new opinions stemmed from having fallen under the sway of an actress-cum-playwright — again older than himself, though not by so much as Lady Maud — called Jennifer Bell. She hailed from a family that had long worked in the Glasgow shipyards, and she was a fire-breathing radical with a passion for something that hitherto Alex had never appreciated: the corpus of myth and legend, folklore and fairy tale that I suppose ultimately defines a culture. Instead of light comedies in the "anyone for tennis?" mode, she argued for endless revivals of *The Beggar's Opera;* she rewrote Othello as a graduate of Balliol and turned Gilgamesh's quest for the herb of immortality into a parabolic counterblast to Shaw's *Doctor's Dilemma.* I remember she had a particular loathing for Noël Coward.

Alex's fame being by then established, he constituted an ideal figurehead for a venture she had long cherished and was at last able to put into effect. Gathering around them a band of a dozen or so like-minded colleagues — notably a certain Larry Hatch, formerly Hütsch, a German who like the celebrated John Heartfield had anglicized his name as a gesture of opposition to Hitler and emigrated when the latter came to power— they departed for the industrial north, determined to battle against what they regarded as the superficiality and triviality of contemporary British drama. Unfortunately, battles on a grander scale supervened.

After considerable heart-searching, because like his companions he suspected the war was more likely to preserve the status quo than lead to a

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brave new world, he offered his services to ENSA, the organization that sent entertainers — mostly comedians and variety artistes, but also musicians and actors — initially to army camps and the like, in the end almost to the front lines so that some performances had bombing and shellfire as their "noises off." ENSA was mocked in its day, but there's no disputing its beneficial impact on morale. As a matter of fact, the first time I ran across Alex was when he came to recite Shakespearean monologues for my corps in North Africa, not long after the episode concerning elephants that I once recounted to you.

Of course, the company was dispersed for most of the war, but they'd made a compact to get together again in peacetime, and those who survived kept their word.

The sole exception — the one who had dismissed the idea out of hand — was Jennifer. She had found in communism the security that many seek in religion, and since Hitler had not yet attacked Russia and the Nazi-Soviet pact was still in force, like most people of her stamp she was blinded to certain truths that the rest of us regarded as obvious.

Her convictions led her into a famous fight with Alex when he announced his intentions, and when the rest of the company, even Larry Hatch, said they, too, were signing up with ENSA, she threatened to make it impossible for them to resume their stage careers after the war.

Storming off, she set about digging up all the dirt she could on them with the intention of using it for what one can only term blackmail. That was what led her to Lady Maud's illegitimate son, who by now was in his teens. He had been baptized James, but he had been brought up by a family called Mortimer and everybody knew him simply as "Mort."

It is possible that the significance of the nickname was not entirely lost on Madame Bell.

However, things changed — changed very rapidly indeed — after Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Confused, lonely, afraid that her former stance would lead to her, rather than Alex and the rest of the company, being rejected by the public when the war was over, she gradually adapted to the new realities and began to think in terms of providing quality drama for the bomb-weary citizens at home.

At the same time, she grew jealous of Lady Maud, not for her wealth but because Maud had borne a son to the man whom, in spite of everything, I believe Jennifer genuinely loved. Inasmuch as it was a "bourgeois emotion," love was to be discouraged, but the virulence of her attacks on her former partner led one to suspect that they masked a real and deep affection of which she herself was fundamentally afraid.

As it turned out, young Mort had

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already discovered the truth about his origins. Under the strain of wartime living, and in particular on learning that Alex was being sent to entertain troops in a battle zone, Lady Maud had sought comfort in drink, and one night she had telephoned the boy and boozily confided in him. This revelation had two major consequences. Mort was already inclined to dislike the small-minded, puritanical family that had brought him up, so he was furious with his natural mother for handing him over to their less-than-tender care; in addition, he became fired with the ambition to make his mark in the theater, so that when he returned from abroad his father would be glad to acknowledge him.

When Jennifer Bell tracked him down, he was easy prey. He ran away from home to join her as that lowest of the low, as assistant stage manager, unpaid.

At the time, she was running a small company based in London, performing in whatever halls could be found among the bomb sites, without scenery to speak of and with virtually no costumes. She had learned to put up with this, but it troubled Mort, for he envisaged grand productions that would revive the most spectacular tradition of the British theater. He exacted a promise from Jennifer—who had taken a more-than-motherly interest in him — that when the war ended, the company would try to secure a lease on the finest surviving theater and mount a season of masterpieces with as much color and glamour as possible.

He was given to self-dramatizing, was young Mort. He had convinced himself that he would be granted starring roles . . . for by this time he was playing walk-on parts and understudying almost everybody, including some of the women. He was still, in the literal sense, a beardless boy. Otherwise, of course, he would have been called up.

A moment ago I said that Jennifer had taken a more-than-motherly interest in him. Please don't misunderstand me; I don't mean to imply that she seduced him. Rather, it seems that she still regarded him as a precious weapon to be wielded against Alex, and was doing all she could to ensure that he remained at her side. She could foresee Alex returning home with his reputation enhanced thanks to newsreels that had shown him bringing culture to the masses in the way she had dreamed of and never achieved. The misfortunes of war had led to him performing the work of Shakespeare and other masters, albeit by dribs and drabs, before the "rough soldiery" — men and women who had never previously been exposed to the classic repertoire, yet sat entranced under the spell of Alex's resounding voice. Her love was turning slowly bitter as her youthful ideals were eroded by time.

It is not, of course, inconceivable

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that the idea of seduction crossed her mind. She was notoriously hot-blooded and had rarely been without an acknowledged lover for more than a month or two. What might have happened under other circumstances is forever a mystery, because Larry Hatch returned from overseas wounded and decorated for bravery. He had been forbidden to join the army because of his German birth, and indeed it had been touch and go whether he was to be interned along with so many others under Regulation 18b concerning enemy nationals. Nonetheless, as a dedicated anti-Nazi, he had wanted to show his pro-Allied convictions in more concrete form than ridding himself of his German accent and learning to speak all varieties of English from BBC Standard to the broadest Scots and Cockney. He had finally had his chance when a German rear guard opened fire on a camp in Normandy where he was — as it happens — singing "We'll Gather Lilacs" by Ivor Novello. He had a very pleasant voice: baritone, if I recall aright.

During a bombardment he risked his life to drag under cover members of the audience who had been hit by shrapnel, until a mortar bomb hurled him twenty feet and left him with half a dozen broken ribs. The local CO was sufficiently impressed to recommend him for a medal. There weren't many available for noncombatants, but they found something, and he came back to London as a bit of a hero.

He immediately fell in with Jennifer again. Not to put too fine a point on it, they kissed and made up. And, victory being now assured, they set about turning into reality the dream young Mort had formulated earlier: that of being the first British theater company to mount a full-scale drama season after the war.

Mort was torn two ways. Clearly, now that Larry was back, his dream of playing star roles that would make his father admire his achievement and acknowledge a worthy son would have to be postponed. Contrariwise, Larry was about the only person on the scene who stood a chance of "swinging the deal." (Vivid, the vernacular, isn't it, sometimes?)

The theater they had set their sights on was the old Jupiter. Commandeered after surviving the Blitz, it had been by turns an emergency hospital, a food store, and a warehouse for government ration books and identity cards. Being wholly unsuited for all these uses, it now stood empty, and they sometimes estimated that a few thousand pounds and a few weeks' work would restore it to its original function. Larry and Jennifer set about the necessary bargaining with officialdom, and secured outline consent to reinstate it during the late spring of 1945.

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That would have been fine. Except for two things: one of the last few V-2 rockets to fall on London blew the Jupiter to smithereens; and Alex came home with a bee in his bonnet. He wanted to shed all trace of his prewar reputation — remember I said he had been regarded mainly as a matinee idol? — and his next role had to be Hamlet.

Or nothing!

He and Jennifer had been corresponding for the past few months, and the tone of her letters had led him to the misapprehension that her new project was to involve the original company, not the present one, which he regarded as composed of shirkers and skulkers. The war had wrought enormous changes in him, but he clung to the compact that had been made five years before, and declared that he would have no truck with any scheme but his own, for the realization of which he was prepared to wait until the rest of the old team came home. Besides, there wasn't a suitable theater anymore — was there? Which was true; now that that Jupiter had gone, instead of taking a lease on a theater of their own, theirs was going to have to be a guest company, at least for the time being. What theater manager would hire a company led by Jennifer and Larry, though? One with Alex at its head, on the other hand . . . !

Unfortunately, news of his wartime exploits had signally failed to penetrate the minds of the London impresarios. They still thought of him as the handsome but temperamental youth who had abandoned the West End for the dubious delights of a "progressive" repertory, and no amount of persuasion could make them change their opinion.

But he was determined to keep on trying for as long as it might take.

Jennifer and Larry combined against him, arguing that something had to be done *now*. Jennifer was particularly vociferous. Londoners had waited long enough for their theaters to reopen; they deserved high standards, instead of which they were likely to get a mix of variety shows imitating the Windmill with its naked girls and blue comedians, and imported American musicals. What she wanted to do was capitalize on the mood of national pride that had followed victory and the election of a Labour government. She wanted to mount pageant plays about the Peasants' Revolt, the English Civil War, and the Tolpuddle Martyrs. In all this Larry took her side.

Alex claimed they were breaking the compact. When Jennifer reminded him that she had never joined it, he accused her of betraying him and went into a fit of the sulks.

Still, in the end he had to give way. He consented to a season of ***Hamlet*** and ***Twelfth Night,*** to be staged at whatever venues came available.

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Mort, on the other hand, felt that if anyone was betraying anyone, his father was betraying him. Now that they had finally met, Alex had acknowledged his paternity, but that was all. They confronted one another as strangers, and neither particularly liked the other. Above all, Alex refused to call on Lady Maud, who, having been widowed during the war, had become an outright alcoholic and spent as much time as possible weeping piteously on Mort's shoulder and complaining how her one true love had abandoned her. (Mort, as he admitted to me, had difficulty in not asking what she had done to him . . . .)

However, there was of course no comparison between their respective conditions. In a year or two, when things were back to normal, Alex was certain to be a leading light of British theater. Lady Maud was doomed to die from cirrhosis of the liver. And Alex wouldn't even pay her a visit.

The form and nature of the trap life had dug in his path began to dawn on Mort.

Under Jennifer's influence, he—like his father before — had delved into the treasury of legend. Sometimes he identified with the rejected child who is miraculously rediscovered by his true parents after making his own way in the world; Moses and Joseph figured frequently in his imaginings at that stage. Then again he thought of himself as the victim condemned through no fault of his own, who has to strive three times as hard as anybody else to redeem himself and attain his rightful station; folktales furnished dozens of exemplars, particularly the prince who had to herd swine. None of these, though, formed a perfect analogy. Until, one day . . . .

But I run ahead of myself. I've neglected to fill in some personal background.

It was about then that I myself was demobilized. Rather than return to the haunts of my youth, I decided to settle in London. However, I had few friends there, so I presumed on even such casual acquaintanceships as my brief encounter with Alex in Africa.

At that juncture, though, he was in too black a mood to be congenial company. Small wonder. What Larry and Jennifer had predicted was actually occurring. The lights had gone on in London's theaterland again, but the impresarios claimed that after the war what people wanted was frothy, superficial entertainment, and they booked comedies and thrillers and operettas and in general did their best to turn the clock back to the thirties. They attempted to separate Alex from the company and make him a top star — they even promised to have plays written for him, a lavish Ruritanian romance, a heroic drama set against the background of the D-Day landings — and he was visibly tempted, though he did say that he

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would accept only provided Jennifer and Larry were in the cast as well.

As I said, Mort — with whom I struck up quite a close friendship, because in his own way he was as lonely as I — Mort was strongly in favor of spectacle and glamour, but Alex paid no attention to his views, nor did he insist on his son being included in the proposed contract.

Negotiations, anyway, ground to a standstill, and they began rehearsals for the plays they had already discussed, booking what premises were available like any small repertory company.

Mort didn't much care what became of *Twelfth Night*, which he regarded as a trivial piece, so he was content to play Feste to Alex's Malvolio, and was learning the lute so as to accompany his own songs. But he was furious about the *Hamlet*. Arguing that it was absurd to have the student from Wittenberg played by a man nearing forty, he had long dreamed of taking the title role while his father played Claudius to Jennifer's Queen Gertrude and Larry's Polonius.

And you know, this wasn't as silly as it might appear. Along with a modicum of his father's good looks, Mort had inherited at least a smidgen of his talent. In particular he was a very quick study, and many of those around him predicted that he could look forward to a brilliant future.

Alex's wartime experiences, however, had immensely broadened and enriched his range. To Mort's indescribable dismay, everybody who saw him, including your humble servant, can testify that "had he been put on," he was likely to prove one of the greatest Hamlets of all time.

A theater materialized, in Croydon, close enough to London to attract the critics. It had been dark for the duration and its owners were looking for something memorable to relaunch it. More and more of the old company returned to Britain, swelled the cast, and whether from genuine respect or mere gratitude began to sing the praises of Alex Orme in those same critics' ears. A well-known composer, who had made the acquaintance of some of them while abroad, offered to write the incidental music. All of a sudden the production started to generate just the kind of excitement Alex and Jennifer and Larry had been hoping for. It was coming to be regarded as a test case, a bulwark of British culture against the inroads of vulgar comedy and crude American imports.

Bear in mind, I beg, that only during the war did the majority of British intellectuals discover for the first time, in the shape of people like Tommy Handley and Old Mother Riley, what is nowadays termed "pop culture," and they had an ineffable contempt for it despite — for the

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most part — professing egalitarian ideals like Jennifer's. Their primary ambition was to take away their indigenous idols from the working class and replace them with others tailored to the preferences of the Establishment . . . with how little success, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones can testify.

Come to think of it, I may be wrong. I seem to have heard little about either of those bands during the past few years . . . But I digress.

So here was Mort being shifted down and down the cast list as old friends from the prewar group turned up. At first he had hoped, if not for Hamlet, then for Laertes, for he wanted to play the scene where he jumps into his sister's grave, an excuse for overacting on the grand scale; someone else was moved in. He was assigned to play Osric the fop, and had done so at two rehearsals when yet another of the Old Gang arrived. One by one they were displacing the members of the wartime company, yet even Jennifer, who had assembled it against all odds, seemed not to mind. Alex dominated the situation so completely that neither she nor Larry dared gainsay him, and even those who were secretly as resentful as Mort himself confined their objections to muttering behind their hands. They had compared their prospects elsewhere with their chance of sharing in what promised to be a memorable production of a universal classic, and judged it prudent to swallow their pride. In a year or two, who could say what consequences might flow from being able to say, "I was in Alex Orme's first *Hamlet*!"

It was too much for Mort. Because by then he was aware that not only on stage, but in the real world, an archetypal pattern engulfed them all, and struggle against it as he might, he had to yield.

The climax occurred on the night of the final dress rehearsal, which Mort had invited me to witness. Having by then been reduced to doubling a miscellany of walk-on parts of which the most important was the Player Queen, he had grown extremely bitter. We were sharing digs by that time, incidentally, which is why I can speak with such authority concerning his state of mind.

One last hope flickered. Everything went exceedingly well at the dress rehearsal, bar the concluding duel; the actor who had replaced him as Laertes made an unconvincing botch of it. This scene Mort knew he could tackle outstandingly well; he had spent as much time practicing his swordplay as he had the lute. When his father called on him to take the foil for a repeat of the fight — it was almost midnight and the stagehands were no longer concealing their yawns— he dared to imagine that the larger part was being restored to him.

On the contrary: his father, by now completely lost in the toils of his

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ambition, meant only to compel his son's replacement to watch and copy, then do better.

Mort disappeared for five long minutes.

When everyone was shouting for him, he returned with his foil, his expression pale and grim, and claimed he had needed to practice in private for a while. I saw his face and guessed his heart was troubled, but I had no chance to speak to him because Alex was so impatient to perfect the duel. The King and Queen resumed their thrones — I recall how incongruous it was to see Larry as Claudius smoking the briar pipe he had taken to as a token of his Englishness — and the fight began.

This time it was superb. It was not what had been rehearsed, but infinitely better! I found myself gasping, clenching my fists, cheering aloud at the clash of steel on steel. As for Alex, at first he was delighted as he parried his son's blade, shouting now and then to Laertes to watch and learn.

Then, little by little, one could see his concentration failing. He must have started to wonder how, between now and tomorrow's opening, he could possibly drill the other actor into as good a performance, and concluded that he couldn't, so all this excellence was wasting time.

Whereupon he dropped his guard.

By now Mort must have been delirious; the frenzy of knowing that one is condemned to live out an archetype has that effect.

At all events, his next action made clear what he had been up to in the five minutes he'd been gone. He had been in the property department, sharpening his foil to a needle point.

Now he drove it home between his father's ribs.

Those present remember the surprise that came over Alex's face as clearly as the look of horror on Jennifer's just before she fainted, and the stifled cry from Larry when he collapsed with a heart attack a moment later. The archetype had been too powerful for them all.

I sincerely hope you never find the same process working in *your* life!

All that, incidentally, happened forty years ago to the day. On every anniversary, you see, I attend a performance of *Hamlet* in memory of Alex Orme.

But I never expect to watch another as fine as his.

I came back to the present with a start. We were alone and the fish-and-chipper in darkness. The last of my chips had congealed in their grease. Mechanically I bundled up the paper I had eaten from and glanced around for a rubbish tin. There was one, but it was already overflowing.

I felt I must have missed some-

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thing, perhaps because my mind had wandered back to my planned review.

"Just a moment!" I said feebly. "Mort's life story doesn't sound in the least like Hamlet's!"

Mr. Secrett stared at me. "Whoever said it did?"

"But I thought . . . !"

He sighed, folding his chip paper more neatly than I.

"Oh, dear. I'd expected you of all people to spot the actual pattern."

"You mean it wasn't *Hamlet*?"

"Goodness, no. Far older! and British, what is more, not Scandinavian. . . You still haven't got it?"

I could only shake my head in confusion.

"Lord, lord, lord! We need more people like Jennifer Bell to explicate the ancient tales. *She* didn't need to be told what had happened. She survived until the sixties, by the way, retired to the West Country and made a living out of writing popular versions of the early British legends. Aimed at children, of course, but pretty good nonetheless, at least on a par with Kingsley's *The Heroes*. Maybe you should take a short course in them!"

Nettled, I said, "So who did Mort decide he was?"

"The name alone should make it clear. . . No? Why, Mordred, obviously."

"Who?"

He rose to his feet in annoyance. "Scrivener, you disappoint me," he said, turning away.

I caught his sleeve.

"Mr. Secrett, I'm sorry but you — misled me so efficiently!"

"Did I really?" Suddenly he was beaming. "The art of deception in words — 'sleight of word,' as one might say — that's always struck me as one of the finest weapons in the arsenal of a writer. As a humble amateur, hoping that some of my reminiscences may outlast my time on Earth . . . . Well, I retract; your incomprehension has turned into a compliment. I'll spell out my argument. The last buses have gone. Shall we walk together to the tube?"

There would probably be a telephone at the station from which I could phone in my review. . . . I acceded.

"The names, clearly, held the greatest power," he said didactically as we trudged from pool to pool of light along the by now empty street. "Whatever meaning the name Arthur may conceal, he was a famous defender of the British people, and it is beyond dispute that Alexander means 'a defender of men,' whether or not one shortens it to Alex. As for Orme, it derives from the North Country form of 'worm,' meaning any sort of reptile. The Great Orm was a monstrous dragon, was it not? Now what was Uther's surname — Arthur's father?"

On the right track at last, I cried, "Pendragon!"

"Yes, indeed. Have you remem-

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bered who Mordred was?"

"Not yet, but I'm getting the others. Jennifer is the Cornish form of Guinevere!"

"Precisely. And Bell echoes *la belle,* the beautiful. Which, by the way, she was."

"What about Lady Maud? You said that wasn't her real name." I was getting caught up in it now.

"Correct. She bore a Welsh name, now commoner as a patronymic—"

"*Morgan*?" I burst out.

He glanced at me crossly. "No need to shout, old chap! But you're correct, of course."

"And Larry Hatch was Lancelot?"

"More exactly, Lorenze Hütsch was Lancelot, the bravest of the company, who engaged in illicit dalliance with the queen. When, in jealous overreaction, Arthur ordered the company of knights to travel abroad — by the way, I don't know whether there were exactly a dozen members of the prewar company led by Alex and Jennifer, but it was about that number — while they were off fighting Leo, king of the Romans, a certain person wangled his way into the queen's affections. Have you finally remembered his identity?"

"Mordred," I said slowly, "was Arthur's bastard son, who dealt him a mortal wound by treachery. Thereafter the king was carried off to Avalon."

"Oh, you can forget about him returning to rule again," Mr. Secrett said dismissively. "I was at the cremation. Though it may be indicative that Jennifer chose Glastonbury for her retirement."

"Why wasn't this all over the papers? I'm sure it can't have been! I was old enough to read the news by then!"

"Were you really?" — in a gently mocking tone. "Good gracious, what a prodigy you must have been! But it was all swept under the carpet, you see.

"Alex Orme had come home as a goodly knight *sans peur et sans reproche* — and if he'd lived, I'd have laid odds on him becoming one of our theatrical knights in fact — and much the same could be said of Larry Hatch. For it to come out that since before the war the latter had been 'having it off' with Alex's mistress, and moreover that our most promising actor had been done in by an illegitimate son he had shown no interest in for almost twenty years. . . . No, better that it be ascribed to a dreadful accident. After the cinema, the theater — don't you agree? — is par excellence the locus where reality and fantasy most closely intertwine. And the inquest was evidential in that same regard.

"The coroner recorded a verdict of death by misadventure, but Mort wasn't summoned as a witness. By then they had shuffled him into the asylum where he remained for the rest of his short life. By that stage there was nothing I could do to help, you understand. In view of his name."

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"His name?" I echoed, picking a bit of fish bone from between my teeth.

"His nickname, strictly. It's the French for death, and hence the cry a huntsman utters to announce the kill. It's a shame he wasn't actually called Mordred, you know. He might have escaped."

"So what does Mordred mean?"

"Brave counselor. . . . I say, old chap, here we are dawdling outside the station and there's a train in about two minutes! Don't you plan to catch it?"

"I have to find a phone and call in my review."

"Ah, so you do. Well, you'll be in plenty of time for the last train of all, since it isn't due for half an hour. It's been pleasant talking to you, as ever. Good night!"

He clapped me on the back and went his way.

For a long moment I stood stock-still, wondering whether any of what he'd told me could be true. Was it possible that a pattern generated by similar names and similar events could really drive someone to commit the awful crime of parricide? Ridiculous!

I drove myself to the conclusion that Mr. Secrett must be growing ga-ga, and made haste to the tube station's only phone box.

It had been vandalized.

I phoned in the review from home, but by then it was nearly 1 A.M. and my deadline was past. Mr. Editor was very curt, and promised I'd receive no more free tickets from that quarter.

Worse still, ever since that evening I've been haunted by the need to analyze the names of everyone I deal with to see whether they are responsible for weaving the pattern of hopelessness that more and more engulfs my mind. Whatever I turn my hand to seems to fail. Nowadays my agent can't even get me ghostwriting commissions, and that's the lowest kind of authorship short of composing horoscopes for pet-food labels.

I'm very much afraid — and I do mean afraid — I'll have to go and ask Mr. Secrett whether what went wrong with the life of his friend Mort is also going wrong with mine.

But if he says it is . . . who will he tell me that I am?

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THE SECOND LIGHTEST

The first Nobel Laureate I ever met and spoke to was the American chemist Harold Clayton Urey (1893-1981). It was not a happy occasion.

I had majored in chemistry as an undergraduate at Columbia University, and I had obtained my Bachelor's degree in June 1939. It was my intention to continue on in graduate work, and I took it for granted that my application to do so would be accepted.

In July, however, I was turned down on the grounds that I had not taken physical chemistry, which was a prerequisite for graduate work in the field. (Unfortunately, I had been pushed toward medicine by my overzealous father, and physical chemistry was not a requirement for medical school — so I had spent my time on other courses.)

I was in no mood to give up, however. When registration time came in September, I went to Columbia and insisted on an interview with the registration committee. At the head of the committee was Urey, who was head of the chemistry department.

He was one other thing too. He was unalterably anti-Asimov. The trouble was that I was loud, gauche, irreverent and sharp-tongued, and was consequently viewed with suspicion by most of the faculty. (No one doubted my intelligence, but that, somehow, didn't seem to count for much.)

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I asked the committee to allow me to take physical chemistry so that when I had completed the course, I could again apply for status as a graduate student. It meant losing a year, but there seemed nothing else I could do. Urey, however, required no time for consideration. As soon as I was finished asking, he said "No!" and pointed to the door.

I had no intention of giving up, so I obtained a course catalog and found a passage that said it was possible to be an "unclassified graduate student" in order to make up a missing course, provided one fulfilled certain requirements (all of which I fulfilled). I returned the next day waving the catalog and repeated my request. Urey shook his head and pointed to the door again. I held my ground and demanded to know the reason for his refusal. "On what grounds?" I said.

Actually, since he didn't have grounds, except for a general dislike of me which he didn't want to admit to, he told me to come back in the afternoon. I did, and he then made me a proposition.

I would be allowed to take physical chemistry, provided I also took a full list of other courses, all of which had physical chemistry as a prerequisite. In other words, in all these other courses, the professors would assume the students already *knew* physical chemistry, and all of them would — except me.

Furthermore, I would be on probation, and if I did not obtain a B average, I would be dropped without credit, so that if I went to another school, Columbia would not let me have any document that would indicate I had passed certain courses, and I would be forced to repeat them. That would mean the loss of a sizable chunk of tuition money, and in those days I had no money to lose.

It is clear to me *now* that Urey was making me an offer he was sure I would not accept, so that he could be rid of me once and for all. However, he underestimated my faith in my own abilities. I accepted the offer without hesitation. After that, I eventually got my B average, was taken off probation, and went on to complete my graduate work successfully.

It has always been difficult for me, ever since, to think of Urey kindly, even though he was on my side in politics. (In 1940, when most of the faculty sported Wilkie buttons, Urey's read "Roosevelt — Labor's Choice".) However, he was a top-notch scientist, whether he liked me or not, so let's go into the matter of his Nobel prize.

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The story begins in 1913, when the English chemist Frederick Soddy (1877-1956) first presented strong arguments to the effect that the various atoms of a particular element need not all be identical, but could exist in two or more varieties that he called "isotopes."

It was clear from the start that isotopes of a particular element did not differ in chemical properties. Soddy's work, however, clearly showed that they differed in mass.

Two years before Soddy's announcement, the New Zealand-born physicist Ernest Rutherford (1871-1937), with whom Soddy had worked, had put forth the notion of a nuclear atom, something which was quickly adopted by physicists. According to this notion, the atom contained a tiny massive nucleus surrounded by a number of electrons.

It was the number and arrangement of electrons that governed chemical properties, so that it was clear that isotopes of a particular element must have identical electron numbers and arrangements or their chemical properties would not be identical. That meant that the difference that distinguished isotopes had to reside in the nucleus.

In 1914, Rutherford presented his reasons for supposing that the simplest nucleus, that of hydrogen, consisted of a single particle, which he called a "proton," and that more complicated nuclei were made up of conglomerations of protons. The individual proton is 1836 times as massive as the electron, but has an electrical charge of precisely the same size, though of opposite nature. The charge of the proton is +1, that of the electron, -1.

In an ordinary atom, which is electrically neutral, the nucleus must contain just the number of protons required to equal the number of electrons outside the nucleus. Thus, the uranium atom, which has 92 electrons outside the nucleus, must have 92 protons inside.

However, the uranium nucleus has a mass 238 times that of a proton. To get around this anomaly, the physicists of the time (for whom protons and electrons were the only known subatomic particles) assumed that in addition to protons, the nucleus would contain proton/electron pairs. A proton/electron pair would have about the mass of a proton (since the electron was so light its mass scarcely mattered). What's more, since the electric charge of the protons and electrons cancel each other, a proton/electron pair has a zero electric charge.

Therefore, it might be that a uranium nucleus would be made up of 92 protons plus 146 proton/electron pairs. The total mass would be 238 times that of a single proton, so that the "atomic weight" of urani-

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um is 238. Since the uranium nucleus has a positive electric charge equal to that of 92 protons, the "atomic number" of uranium is 92.

Actually, it turned out that the concept of the proton/electron pair inside the nucleus didn't hold up. The pair consisted of two separate particles, and certain nuclear properties depended on the total number of particles in the nucleus. Those nuclear properties wouldn't work out properly unless the proton/electron pairs were replaced by single particles. The single particle would have to duplicate the properties of the proton/electron pair, so that it would have to have about the mass of a proton and be electrically uncharged.

Such a particle, widely hypothesized in the 1920's, was difficult to detect because of its lack of charge. It was finally discovered only in 1932 by the English physicist James Chadwick (1891-1974). He called it the "neutron," and it took the place, almost at once, of the proton-electron pair. Thus, the nucleus of the uranium atom can be viewed as being made up of 92 protons and 146 neutrons.

During the 1920's, physicists used proton/electron pairs to explain the nature of isotopes, but in order to avoid misleading the Gentle Reader, I will speak of neutrons only, even though it is anachronistic to do so for events prior to 1932.

The nuclei of all uranium atoms *must* have 92 protons. Any deviation from that number would mean that the number of electrons outside the nucleus would have to be something other than 92. This would change the chemical properties of the atom, and it would no longer be uranium. However, what if the number of neutrons changed? That wouldn't alter the charge of the nucleus or the number of electrons outside the nucleus, so that uranium would remain uranium. The *mass* of the nucleus would, however, change.

Thus, in 1935, the Canadian-American physicist Arthur Jeffrey Dempster (1886-1950) discovered uranium atoms that, in addition to the 92 protons in the nucleus, contained 143 neutrons (*not* 146). The atomic number is still 92 but the mass number is 92 + 143 = 235. Therefore, we have uranium-238 and uranium-235, and these are the two isotopes of uranium that occur in nature. They don't occur in equal quantities, to be sure, but nothing in the isotope theory suggests they must. In fact, for every atom of uranium-235 in nature, there are 933 atoms of uranium-238.

Soddy worked out his isotope concept from a detailed study of ra-

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dioactive atoms and their manner of breaking down. That, however, was a weak point in his theory. Radioactivity had been discovered in 1896 and seemed to involve only very massive atoms at first, atoms that broke down spontaneously into somewhat lighter atoms. The radioactive atoms seemed very different from ordinary atoms, and it might be argued that perhaps isotopes existed only in those radioactive elements.

Uranium (atomic number 92) and thorium (atomic number 90) were the two radioactive elements that occurred in nature to an appreciable extent, and their breakdown ended, finally, with the formation of the stable element, lead (atomic number 82). However, uranium broke down to a variety of lead whose nucleus consisted of 82 protons and 124 neutrons (lead-206), while thorium broke down to a lead nucleus of 82 protons and 126 neutrons (lead-208).

If this were so, then lead must consist of these two isotopes at least, and it must exist in nature as a mixture of them in varying proportions. Lead that is extracted from thorium ores must be rich in lead-208 and have a higher atomic weight than lead extracted from uranium ores. In 1914, Soddy carefully determined the atomic weight of lead from different sources and showed that there was indeed an easily detected difference in atomic weight.

The fact that the stable element, lead, consisted of isotopes was not, in itself, an important broadening of the concept, because the lead isotopes result from the breakdown of radioactive elements. What was needed was some demonstration that isotopes occurred in elements that had nothing to do with radioactivity at all.

Stable elements (other than lead) do not show significant differences in atomic weight when obtained from different sources or purified by different methods. That may be either because all their atoms are alike, or because they always consist of the same mixture of isotopes.

What if one could separate the isotopes, assuming they are there to be separated? An ordinary way of separating two different substances is to take advantage of differences in chemical properties. The isotopes of a particular element, however, are essentially identical in chemical properties.

However, two isotopes of a particular element are different in mass. Suppose a mixture of the nuclei of such isotopes is made to speed through electromagnetic fields. (Physicists knew how to set up such a situation in Soddy's time.) The nuclei, being electrically charged, would interact with the field and follow a curved path. The more massive

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nuclei have greater inertia and would therefore curve slightly less. If the nuclei in the course of their motion were made to fall on a photographic plate, the developed photograph would show a doubled curve, as each isotope followed its own slightly different path.

In 1912, the English physicist Joseph John Thomson (1856-1940) noticed such a slightly doubled path in connection with flying nuclei of the element neon. He wasn't sure as to the meaning of this, but when the isotope concept was announced the next year, there seemed a chance that what he had detected were two neon isotopes.

One of Thomson's assistants, Francis William Aston (1877-1945), set about studying the matter in earnest. He worked out a device in which the electromagnetic field caused all the nuclei of a particular mass to fall on one spot on the photographic film. The device was called a "mass spectograph." From the position of the marks that resulted, the masses of the isotopes could be calculated, and from the intensity of the marks, the relative quantities.

In 1919, Aston was able to separate neon nuclei in such a way as to show that it consisted of two isotopes, neon-20 and neon-22. What's more, of all the neon atoms, roughly 9/10 were neon-20 and 1/10 were neon-22. That explained why the atomic weight of neon was 20.2. (In later years, as the mass-spectograph was refined, a third isotope, neon-21, was detected. We now know that out of every thousand neon atoms, 909 are neon-20, 88 are neon-22, and 3 are neon-21.)

Aston, through his mass-spectrographic work, found that a number of stable elements consisted of two or more isotopes, and this definitely established Soddy's isotope concept. Nothing has ever happened since to place it in doubt.

Whenever the atomic weight of an element is considerably removed from a whole number, we can be sure it consists of two or more isotopes, whose masses and relative quantities average out to the atomic weight.

A number of elements have atomic weights that are almost exactly whole numbers, and then it is quite possible that all of the atoms of that element are indeed of the same mass. For instance, fluorine consists only of fluorine-19, sodium of sodium-23, aluminum of aluminum-27, phosphorus of phosphorus-31, cobalt of cobalt-59, arsenic of arsenic-75, iodine of iodine-127, gold of gold-197 and so on.

In the case of those elements with only one nuclear species present (there are 19 of them), it is difficult to speak of "isotopes," since these

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refer to two or more varieties of an element. For that reason, the American chemist, Truman Paul Kohman (1916-) suggested, in 1947, that each atomic variety be called a 'nuclide."

The term is frequently used, but I doubt if it will ever replace the word "isotope," which is already ground too deeply into the language to be removed. Then, too, physicists have learned to create isotopes in the laboratory that don't occur in nature. These artificial isotopes are all radioactive, so that they are called "radioisotopes." Any element that has only one stable nuclide is sure to have a number of radioisotopes that can be formed. There is no element that consists of only a single nuclide if one counts in the possible radioisotopes, and, therefore, strictly speaking, the term "isotope" is usable at all times. We need only say that fluorine, for instance, has only one ***stable*** isotope, implying the existence of radioisotopes as well.

Some elements, to be sure, have atomic weights that are very close to whole numbers and are yet made up of a number of stable isotopes. What happens in that case, is that the element is made up preponderantly of one of those isotopes, with the others quite rare and, therefore, contributing little of the atomic weight.

One startling example of this was discovered in 1929. The American chemist William Francis Giauque (1895-1982) used the mass spectrograph to show that oxygen consisted of three isotopes, oxygen-16, oxygen-17 and oxygen-18, all stable. Of these, however, oxygen-16 was by far the most common. Out of every 10,000 oxygen atoms, 9,976 are oxygen-16, 20 are oxygen-18, and 4 are oxygen-17.

This shook chemists, since for a hundred years they had been arbitrarily setting the atomic weight of oxygen equal to 16.0000 and measuring all other atomic weights against that as a standard. After 1919, this came to be known as "chemical atomic weights," while physicists used the mass of oxygen-16 = 16.0000 as the standard for "physical atomic weight." In 1961, chemists and physicists compromised by using carbon-12 = 12.0000 as the standard. That was pretty close to the chemical atomic weight table (see THE WEIGHTING GAME, F & SF, April 1962).

The oxygen = 16.0000 standard might have remained satisfactory if you could be sure that the mixture of isotopes of each element always remained precisely the same at all times and under all conditions. If the different isotopes of an element had *precisely* the same chemical properties, the mixture would always be identical, but they don't. The chemi-

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cal properties are essentially the same but there are tiny differences. The more massive isotopes are always a little more sluggish about participating in any physical or chemical change than are the less massive ones. There is, therefore, the chance of finding slightly different mixes now and then.

In 1913, the American chemist Arthur Becket Lamb (1880-1952) prepared various samples of water from different sources and purified them all to an extreme. It was certain that each sample contained only water molecules with inconsiderable quantities of any impurity. Lamb then determined the density of each sample with the utmost sensitivity of which the times were capable.

If all the water molecules were absolutely identical, all the densities should have been the same within the limits of measurement. However, the densities varied by four times the amount of those limits. It was a variation of less than a millionth from the average, but it was real, and what it meant was that all the water molecules were *not* absolutely identical. Once the concept of isotopes was introduced the next year, it could be seen that the implication was that either oxygen, or hydrogen, or both, consisted of a mixture of isotopes.

The molecule of water consists of two hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom (H_20). If all the water molecules contained an oxygen-18, the density of such water would be nearly 12 percent higher than that of ordinary oxygen-16 water. The chances of having water that contained only oxygen-18 are virtually zero, to be sure, but small variations, depending on sources and on the methods of purification, would easily account for Lamb's results.

The fact that a massive isotope behaves more sluggishly than a less massive one opens an avenue for the separation of the two. As early as 1913, Aston had allowed neon gas to percolate through a porous partition. His feeling was that the less massive isotope (if any) would get through faster, so that the sample coming through first would be higher than normal in the less massive isotope, while the part remaining behind would be higher than normal in the more massive isotope. He repeated the procedure over and over again and eventually obtained a sample of neon which was so depleted in massive isotope that its atomic weight was 20.15 in place of the normal 20.2. He also obtained a sample of neon that had an atomic weight of 20.28 because it was enriched in the more massive isotope.

(This and other methods have been used to increase the percentage

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of a particular isotope in a sample of element. The most spectacular example was the enrichment procedures used to obtain uranium containing a higher than normal quantity of uranium-235, during the development of the nuclear fission bomb.)

Now there arises the question of hydrogen and its possible isotopes. Its atomic weight is just under 1.008, and that is quite close to a whole number. This means hydrogen may be composed of only a single isotope, hydrogen-1 (with a nucleus consisting of 1 proton and nothing else). If it contains a more massive isotope, that must, at the very least be hydrogen-2 (with a nucleus made up of 1 proton plus 1 neutron), and this can only be present in trifling quantities.

Hydrogen-2 would be present in such small quantities that it was not likely to be easily detectable unless a sample of hydrogen were enriched in this more massive isotope. As early as 1919, the German physicist Otto Stern (1888-1969) tried to use Aston's diffusion method on hydrogen but got negative results. He concluded that hydrogen was made up of hydrogen-1 only. This came about because of faults in his experimental technique, but that wasn't apparent at the time and his report discouraged further research in this direction.

Nor was the mass-spectrograph of any help. To be sure there were markings that might have been the result of the presence of hydrogen-2, but these might also have been the result of hydrogen molecules made up of two hydrogen-1 atoms (H_2).

Once the oxygen isotopes were discovered in 1929, however, it became possible to determine the atomic weight of hydrogen more accurately. It seemed that the atomic weight of hydrogen was now just a little too high for it to consist of hydrogen-1 only. In 1931, two American physicists, Raymond Thayer Birge (1887 - ?) and Donald Howard Menzel (1901-1976), suggested that if there were 1 atom of hydrogen-2 for every 4500 atoms of hydrogen-1, that would be enough to account for the slightly high atomic weight.

That, apparently, inspired my future near-nemesis, Urey, to enter the field. He first attempted to detect traces of hydrogen-2 in hydrogen.

It seemed to him, from theoretical considerations, that hydrogen-2 and hydrogen-1 would give off radiation at slightly different wavelengths when heated.

Such spectral differences would be true of all isotopes, but generally, such difference would be so small as to be very difficult to spot. However, differences among isotopes increase not with the difference

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in mass but with the ratio. Thus, uranium-238 is three units more massive than uranium-235, but the former is only 1.28 percent more massive than the latter.

The ratio per unit difference increases rapidly, however, as the total mass decreases. Thus, oxygen-18 is 12.5 percent more massive than oxygen-16, even though the difference is only 2 units. As for hydrogen-2, it is 100 percent more massive than hydrogen-1, even though the difference is only 1 unit.

The spectral difference between the two hydrogen isotopes should therefore be much greater than that between two isotopes of any other element, and Urey felt that the ease with which the spectral difference could be detected between the two hydrogen isotopes was greater than the distinction of mass that the mass spectograph would pick up.

He calculated the wavelength of the spectral lines to be expected of hydrogen-2 and then studied the light of heated hydrogen with a very large spectral grating. He found faint lines exactly where he thought they ought to exist.

Urey might have rushed to report this in order to gain the credit for having detected hydrogen-2, but he was a methodical and honorable scientist and realized that the very faint lines he detected might be the result of impurities in the hydrogen or of miscellaneous faults in his equipment.

The lines were faint because so little hydrogen-2 was present in the hydrogen. What he had to do, then, was to apply measures that would increase the percentage of hydrogen-2 and see if the supposed hydrogen-2 lines in the spectrum would grow stronger.

He didn't try diffusion, the method that had failed Stern. Instead, it occurred to him that if he were to liquefy hydrogen and allow it to evaporate slowly, the hydrogen-1 atoms, being less massive, would more easily evaporate than would the hydrogen-2 atoms. If he therefore began with a liter of liquid hydrogen and let 99 percent of it vaporize, the final milliliter remaining might be considerably richer in hydrogen-2 than the original hydrogen was.

This he did, and it worked. When he evaporated the final bit of hydrogen, heated it, and studied the spectrum, he found that the supposed hydrogen-2 lines had strengthened over six-fold. According to his initial calculations from all this, Urey decided that there was 1 hydrogen-2 atom for every 4500 hydrogen-1 atoms, just as Birge and Menzel had predicted. Later work, however, showed this to be an over-

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estimate. Actually, there is 1 hydrogen-2 atom for every 6500 hydrogen-1 atoms.

Urey presented his results in a ten-minute talk at a meeting of the American Physical Society at the end of December 1931. His formal written reports were published in 1932.

The discovery of hydrogen-2 proved enormously important. Because of the great percentage difference between the masses of hydrogen-1 and hydrogen-2, it proved far easier to separate these two isotopes than any other two. Soon, quite pure samples of hydrogen-2 ("heavy hydrogen") were obtained, as well as samples of water with molecules containing hydrogen-2 in place of hydrogen-1 ("heavy water").

Dealing with heavy hydrogen and heavy water made the isotope seem worth a special name. Urey suggested "deuterium" from a Greek work for "second," since if all the isotopes are listed in order of increasing mass, hydrogen-1, the lightest possible, would be first, and hydrogen-2, the second lightest possible, would be second.

It was quite clear by 1934 that the eagerness with which chemists and physicists began to work with hydrogen-2 would lead to remarkable advances in science. It did, too (as I shall explain next month) and it was not at all surprising when, in 1934, Urey received the Nobel Prize in chemistry.

What's more, Urey did not rest on his laurels but went on to do important work on the origins of life, on planetary chemistry, and so on. He may not have liked me and I may not have liked him, but he was a great scientist.

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Michael Bishop's latest takes place at a science fiction convention, not exactly a brand-new idea, but under Mr. Bishop's thoughtful and innovative direction, it turns into a fresh and surprising story...

Taccati's Tomorrow

BY
MICHAEL BISHOP

Driving into Chattanooga, Bev had a foretaste of the way Gil's long-awaited meeting with the writer Nathan Taccati would sour. At the wheel of the Pinto wagon, Gil was banking a high, multilane curve when one of the six or seven foreign-looking kids in the pickup truck in front of them hurled something over its tailgate. Whatever the shirtless urchin had thrown bounced a few times and then came skittering at the Pinto like a tiny animal with its tail on fire. Bev put one hand on the dashboard and Gil wrenched the steering wheel to avoid hitting the jettisoned object, which, in a tatter of greasy smoke, exploded. Loudly.

"What the hell!" Gil cried, swerving again.

Bev heard someone honk, and immediately Gil cut right to avoid a collision. Shuddering, the wagon fishtailed, and Bev jammed her feet into the floor mat as if to brake a runaway semi. Her companion had almost lost it. They both knew that he had come within a fingernail of turning them into a trash-compacted tangle against the concrete retaining wall. Gil eased off the accelerator and moved the wagon as far right as the expressway would let him.

Six or seven car lengths ahead, the kids in the pickup were laughing and horsing around. Mexican or Vietnamese, Bev decided. Distance and noonday glare made it hard to say. They were angular and swarthy, though, and they had enjoyed the hell out of nearly killing an American couple in a beat-up old station wagon.

"I'm going to catch 'em," Gil informed her. "You know, ram 'em like the bad guy in the chariot race in *Ben-Hur*."

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"Gil Vannoy!"

"The little bastards threw a cherry bomb at us. Just about did us in." He was visibly shaking.

"Come on, Gil. You'll just make it worse."

His anger appeared to dissipate. Was he relieved that she did not require some conspicuous defense of their "honor" in this basically meaningless highway episode? Maybe. Bev was gratified to note that when the pickup slunk down an exit two ramps ahead of the one to Martin Luther King Boulevard, Gil made no effort to pursue it. He continued to the King exit — but it was not until he had parked the car in the garage beneath the Read House in downtown Chattanooga that he finally stopped shaking.

Bev Jefferds and Gil Vannoy had come north to Tennessee from Warm Springs, where he worked for the Georgia Power Company as a troubleshooter. Bev, who was the chief naturalist at nearby Mockingbird Gardens, had agreed to sacrifice four days of annual vacation to her companion's wish to attend a gathering of science fiction writers, editors, and ostensible fans. (*Ostensible* because it was Bev's experience that the "fans" at these get-togethers clearly preferred partying to either reading or talking about science fiction.) Scheduled to last four days, this convention would consist primarily of panels, readings, costume contests, all-night card games, and impromptu or planned room parties.

Already, Bev noted, teenagers dressed up like Darth Vader clones or barbarian warriors or sequined *Wizard of Oz* caricatures were matter-of-factly strolling the sedate lobby and carpeted hallways of the Read House. While hauling luggage upstairs from the hotel's underground parking garage, in fact, Gil nearly ran into a nubile young woman in a fur halter and a leather loincloth.

"That's why we've given up a trip to the beach, isn't it?" Bev teased him, once they were out of the young woman's hearing. "So you can eye the half-naked nymphets."

"I came to see Taccati."

"Well, I hope he's wearing bikini briefs. That would only be fair. After all, I've given up Jacksonville for another silly sci-fi convention."

"Ess-eff," Gil said peevishly. "Not sci-fi."

"Whatever." Bev had heard his ready-made lecture on this subject before. Although he did not think of himself as a fan, in the three years of their relationship he had dragged her to three other conventions — not, as he always qualified this suspicious record, to leer at the poignant spaced-out girls in their ridiculous Maiden Form bra costumes or even to sit in on the sometimes stupefyingly tedious panel discussions. No, his purpose was always to meet one of the writers

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who had meant something to him as an introspective high school kid and later as an idealistic young adult. (In another month he would celebrate — if that was the right word — his thirty-eighth birthday. Bev was six years younger.) Thank God, he was still an idealist of sorts. Reading what he liked to call "serious science fiction" seemed to allay his tendency to despair and encouraged him to believe in the open-ended future of the human species. This aura of fragile optimism was what had attracted Bev to him in the first place. It had enabled her to drive or fly with him to faraway conventions honoring Theodore Sturgeon, Frederik Pohl, and finally, Ray Bradbury.

This time the convention's guest of honor was Nathan Taccati, a somewhat less popular author of philosophical science fiction with whom Gil said he had briefly corresponded in the late 1970s. At Gil's enthusiastic urging, Bev had recently read a paperback novel of the writer's, one of more than two dozen that Taccati had produced during the years of the Vietnam conflict. (Of late, Gil told her, Taccati had devoted himself to reviewing for magazines and to touring college campuses for lecture fees larger than any of his early paperback advances. Bev had not cared for the "novel." It had combined an infuriating lack of detail with a stylistic clumsiness bespeaking both haste and an imperfectly developed eye. All the characters had been androids, robots, cyborgs, machines, or telemetrically controlled human beings. Further, the whole clunky contrivance had taken place on a Nightmare Planet whose ugly two-syllable name — Andres; Cybok; something like that — had done double duty as the book's title.

Gil and Bev's room was a neat but tiny cubicle on the fourth floor. In New York or L.A., a room no bigger would cost at least half again as much; and, if Bev knew Gil, they would be spending most of their time in the con suite or in the other loggia-level banquet rooms anyway. She watched as the excited fellow struggled to stow some of the gear they had brought up from the garage. One grocery bag contained the entire yellowing oeuvre of Nathan Taccati at novel length, and this lopsided sack Gil placed on the carpet next to the bed. He wanted not only to meet the Miami-based writer but to solicit autographs. Bev thought this an undeniably fannish obsession, but Gil argued that he did it only to increase the value of his library. For whom, though? She could not imagine him selling his musty holdings for anything less than the accumulated wealth of the Rockefellers.

"When do you think you'll see him, Gil? The con committee's going to have a hundred different things for him to do."

"He'll see me. We corresponded."

"Five years ago. Did he answer the

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letter you wrote him to say you were going to be here?"

"He didn't have time. I sent it only last Saturday. He may not've gotten it, Bev."

With the toe of one tennis shoe, Bev nudged the grocery bag bulging with Nathan Taccati's futuristic fictions. Which one had she read? Gil told her again, but the moment he spoke the book's forgettable title, she promptly reforgot it. It was lumpish and inhumane. Bev said so aloud — not for the first time — and Gil pedantically pointed out that you read Taccati for ideas, not style or characterization. He dramatized philosophical concepts that most contemporary writers eschewed in favor of middle-aged angst and adultery.

"That's admirable?"

"Look, Taccati is a critic of technological excess, Bev. Of impersonalization. The nonhumans in his stories — the ones that upset you so much, the robots and aliens and so forth — they're metaphorical stand-ins for present-day men and women. That's why his stuff troubles people the way it does."

"It doesn't trouble *me*, fella. It makes me want to read something else."

"Taccati's an acquired taste. You have to grant him his premises. You have to get past old-fashioned notions of rationality to the breadth of his invention and the moral force of his weird little allegories. He's a latter-day, high-tech Ecclesiastes."

Bev laughed at this analogy. "Do you have a pen?"

"A pen?"

"So that your high-tech Ecclesiastes can write 'Vanity, vanity, all is vanity' on the flyleafs of all your holy first editions."

Fumbling at his pockets, Gil said, "I don't have a pen."

Bev opened her woven handbag and took from it the plastic ballpoint that she had bought in a drugstore in Warm Springs. She gave this to Gil, who looked at it as if it were an artifact retrieved from a Jovian moon by an unmanned space probe.

"Now you're all set," Bev said. "Just carry your grocery bag around until you find him, give him that pen, and tie him to a chair till he's signed everything but the elastic in your shorts."

"Ha ha."

"Just don't build your hopes up too high, Gil."

"I'm not. I haven't. Didn't Bradbury offer to take us to lunch? Didn't Ted Sturgeon hug me like a long-lost brother?"

"O.K.," Bev said. "O.K."

But finding Taccati in the multistory labyrinth of the Read House was not easy, and cornering him for a private talk proved virtually impossible. Bev watched Gil's frustration mount. The desk clerks would not give out the writer's room number, nor would

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the harried organizers of the convention. By using their program booklets and periodically checking the message board on the mezzanine level, Bev and Gil were able to *see* Taccati several times over the first two days.

In fact, after a fiercely argumentative panel Thursday night on "Creating Aliens," Gil even managed to work his way forward and exchange awkward pleasantries with the Guest of Honor. Never, though, was Gil about to steer Taccati away from the other attendees for an intimate discussion of the coming world state or whatever an *ess-eff* writer and one of his most fervent admirers would be likely to talk about. And it was . . . well, *semi*heartbreaking watching Gil try.

On Friday morning, Taccati gave a reading of an excerpt from the novel on which, according to Gil, he had been working for the past six years. Bev folded her arms and waited for it to be over. Although the man read with real animation and dash, the passage he had chosen meandered like a brook in an eroded meadow. Afterward, to Bev's dismay, Gil again squeezed through a chaos of folding chairs and chatting teenagers to talk to the Great Man. This time he actually succeeded in gaining his full attention. Bev heard Gil invite the portly writer to lunch. He would buy, of course, and they could resume in person the debate over ends and means that they had once pursued in their brief correspondence.

"Extraordinarily kind of you, Mr. Vannoy," Nathan Taccati said in his booming voice, "but — " He gestured at the man beside him, whom Bev recognized as the science fiction editor at a large New York publishing house. A kid, really, T-shirted and muscular, more like a promising minor-league catcher than an up-and-coming literary doyen. " — I already have an invitation for lunch."

Bev made her way forward to give Gil moral support. He was glancing warily at the other people who had herded themselves around his hero. They included not only costumed fans but male and female writers as young as, or even younger than, the editor, rising stars whose work Gil privately disparaged as either flashy or callow. One of these newcomers — an olive-skinned creature with the faint shadow of a mustache on her upper lip —had held forth at length on the "Creating Aliens" panel, contradicting or qualifying Taccati's every word. Today, though, she was clearly a member of the privileged circle encompassed by the young editor's expense account. Bev could sense the invisible force field emanating from these people, excluding Gil from their company.

"If I could go along," she was chagrined to hear Gil tell them, "I'd be happy to pay my own way."

"I'm afraid we'll be talking business," the T-shirted editor said. "A lot of it's going to be boring and

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some of it'll be confidential. Why don't you and Nate try to work out something for tomorrow."

"Jack, I'm just about booked solid," Taccati said.

"I believe it," said the olive-skinned young woman. "Everybody here wants a piece of you."

"Anytime," Gil put in. "At your convenience, sir."

Taccati finally met Gil's gaze, acknowledging him as a person rather than as an animate annoyance. But, she noted, he made this acknowledgment only grudgingly, as if he had a human code of behavior denying him recourse to outright snobbery. Bev sensed that Gil had trapped Taccati with this code; the man felt sorry for her beau, would find it hard to sleep if he lied or dissimulated to avoid the interview that Gil wanted. Taccati had no choice but to do the right thing.

"How early do you get up?" he asked.

"Just name the hour."

"Meet me at seven-thirty at the McDonald's across the street for breakfast. That'll give us time to talk before these heartless Simon Legrees start cracking the whip across my back again."

"I'll buy," Gil reiterated.

"Let's make it Dutch, Mr. Vannoy. That way we can order everything we want and say whatever we like to each other. When Jack here buys, for instance, I have to pretend all his lousy acquisitions are masterpieces — even though he's turning his house into a schlock factory without parallel in commercial publishing."

Everyone around Taccati guffawed, the dumpling-cheeked Jack louder than anybody else. Bev, incredulous, realized that she was the only person near the Guest of Honor not utterly tickled by his lamely witty repartee. Then she and Taccati locked eyes, Taccati appearing to register her tacit disapproval and she reddening because she had let him.

Gil, unaware of this silent exchange, said, "Seven-thirty, then," and extended his hand so that Taccati had to shake it.

He tossed you a crumb," Bev told Gil upstairs in their room. "Breakfast at McDonald's! That's not much better than asking you to sit on the edge of the bathtub while His Royal Majesty shaves."

"Bev — "

"You don't intend to lug your bag of books under the Golden Arches so that he can autograph copies over lukewarm hotcakes and Egg McMuffins, do you?"

"You were the one who told me not to get my hopes up. At least he's seeing me. Didn't I tell you he would?" The afternoon and evening of the second day dragged for Bev. With three other conventions behind her, she felt that she had already seen and

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heard everything. Déjà vu did not apply.The experience was instead one of grueling Sisyphean recapitulation. You climbed steps (or rode elevators) and got nowhere. You looked at amateur and professional artwork that seemed to be on endless rotation from other conventions. You thumbed through books and magazines that you had thumbed through in other huckster rooms in other cities. You listened to writerly talk — gripes, counsel, tricks of the trade — almost as old as the profession. The emphasis on word-processing systems and computer-game spin-offs might be new, but so what? Bev had no desire to learn about these up-to-the-minute technologies; she was a woods and wildflower person who liked good music and informed talk with people who were not so single-minded that they either harped or harangued.

Most convention-goers were just not her kind of folk. If that was snobbery — which, intellectually, she hated — well, Bev knew that they in turn dismissed her as a "mundane." This was a fannish epithet that not only pigeonholed but obliterated; it wiped you out, as someone altogether beneath consideration. She could live with Gil's bouts of fannishness because, thank God, they broke out so rarely, as if she had fallen for an otherwise decent Joe who got hives every time he ate fresh plums but whose taste for the fruit sometimes overcame his native good sense. And so Bev was bored, irritated with Gil for letting Taccati patronize him, and anxious for Sunday to come so that they could pack up and go home.

Maybe Taccati had already gone home. After his reading, no one could find him. He missed an afternoon panel, he was nowhere to be seen that evening, and a bit of midnight Grand Guignol that he was supposed to narrate in the main banquet room had to lurch along with a surrogate emcee. Watching this last campy production, Bev told Gil that unless she went with him tomorrow morning, he would probably be eating breakfast alone. All signs suggested that the Great Taccati had skipped out.

Gil's silence, Bev thought, indicated that he had reluctantly reached the same conclusion.

After the last make-believe ghoul fanged its last lingerie-clad victim, the couple rode an elevator downstairs to the lobby. They had decided to have a nightcap before turning in. Neither of them spoke on the ride down, and it occurred to Bev that they were as glum as dyspeptic cops.

In the open space beneath the hotel's mezzanine, however, a baby grand piano dominated a large square of marble floor. At the piano's keyboard, plunking out a melancholy jazzish tune, sat one of Taccati's younger colleagues. Bev halted to listen to him play. His name, Gil said, was Azoba Obiesie, a subsidiary guest of the convention. Checking her program

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book, Bev discovered that the dark, slender man was an expatriate Nigerian, the only African with full membership in the Science Fiction Writers of America. He had a gaunt, intelligent face with huge, lustrous eyes, which, playing, he sometimes closed. His only upper garment — somehow, it did not look ludicrous on him — was a sleeveless thermal parka of pale lavender. Bev was astonished by the nimbleness of the Nigerian's fingers, the flowing ease of his technique.

"C'mon, Miz Jefferds," Gil grumbled. "I'm ready for a good stiff shot of bourbon and branch water."

"Go ahead. I want to hear this. I'll catch up with you in three or four minutes."

Gil hesitated only a moment before sliding his hands into his trouser pockets and sauntering off in the direction of the first-floor bar. The slouchy set of his shoulders bespoke his irritation.

So what? Bev asked herself. I've accompanied him to smoke-filled room parties and idiotic group discussions; he can cool his heels a little while out of deference to *me*. So she cocked her head and listened to Azoba Obiesie make magic at the old-fashioned instrument panel of the baby grand. When he had finished, she applauded, and the African smiled at her sidelong in a way at once amused and self-deprecating.

"Thank you very much, kind lady."

"Do you know Beethoven's 'Albumblatt'?" Bev impulsively asked him. This was a piece that she often tried to play on her clunky upright. Mastery of its complicated fingering still eluded her.

Obiesie leaned into the piano. Without any additional coaxing or even the benefit of sheet music, he began to play. Clean, clear music filled the hotel's inner court, rising to the heedless slave girls and starship pilots on the galleries, protracting itself with the welcomeness of a favorite taste or easy, unrushed sex. The notes of the Beethoven melody filigreed the stale hour, muting the disappointments of the day. Then the music ceased, and Bev handed Obiesie her program book.

"Please sign this for me," she said. "Right there next to your biographical sketch."

He raised his eyebrows, taking the booklet with what Bev interpreted as humble rather than put-upon reluctance, but then signed its margin and handed it back.

"Do you know if Nathan Taccati's still here?" she asked to cover her own embarrassment.

"Why? Are you an admirer of his?"

"Oh, no, not at all. A friend of mine's supposed to have breakfast with him tomorrow, though."

Obiesie glanced conspicuously at his watch. "Today, you mean." But he assured Bev that Taccati had not left Chattanooga and that he would almost certainly honor his promise to

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breakfast with her friend. Taccati, after all, was an honorable man.

"Thank you," Bev said, retreating from the baby grand. "Thank you, Mr. Obiesie."

The Nigerian nodded abstractedly, swung back to the keyboard, and cajoled from it another angelic smattering of jazz.

At exactly 7:30 A.M., Bev Jefferds and Gil Vannoy were in the McDonald's across the street from the Read House. Taccati had not arrived. For that reason, Bev was especially glad that she had dissuaded Gil from bringing along his grocery bag of books. He was coming on too much like a fan, sacrificing dignity to overeager earnestness. Even he seemed to understand that. Therefore, he had left his books in their room.

Bev found a place in the dining room — it was crowded this morning — while Gil got in line behind a pair of black men in boots and overalls. From where she sat, Bev had a good view of the entire service counter, and, very soon, Taccati came in, nodded at Gil, and added himself to a line even longer than his.

"Tell me what you want, sir, and I'll get it for you," Gil told the writer. "My treat and my pleasure. You can go sit down with Bev." He nodded over his shoulder at her.

Taccati shook his head. "Kind of you, 'preciate it. But everything I eat on the road is tax-deductible and I need a receipt. 'Sides, haven't made up my mind yet. Pro'ly change it 'fore I get to the register. Go ahead, Mr. Vannoy, go ahead."

"Gil."

"Gil, then." In a black wool cap and a pink satin jacket — Bev decided that science fiction writers had strange sartorial tastes — Taccati was a squinting soft-sculpture monument to himself. He made a small show of studying the illuminated menu behind the counter.

Ultimately, the volume of McDonald's morning business prevented the writer from joining Bev and Gil until they had almost finished eating. They made room for his Styrofoam packages while Taccati remained standing to cream and stir his coffee.

"Don't usually sit down with my back to all the other customers in a bar or restaurant," he declared. "For that very blunder, Wild Bill Hickok paid with his life — in a saloon in Deadwood, South Dakota."

"Imagine that," Bev said.

"But since you guys beat me to the dividing wall, I'm gonna make an exception and let you keep your seats."

"Gracious of you," Bev said.

With his plastic stirrer, Taccati touched the brim of his Greek fisherman's cap. From then on, even after he sat down, their talk — in Bev's estimation — shambled around like an alms-seeker in the parlor of a nursing home.

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Gil, she saw, could not figure out how to focus the meeting. Taccati had plenty of words, but they all took spark from the tyranny of either his large intestine or the little minds at the Internal Revenue Service. I'm a fool to eat so much. Why can't the government leave a poor but virtuous writer like me alone? Nothing at all about Gil's favorite topics — the inevitability of a single worldwide government, the infinite promise of space travel, the generic perfectibility of the human species. This morning, at any rate, Taccati's thoughts had less exalted origins, arising in his billfold or his gut.

About twenty seconds after his Wild Bill Hickok remark, Bev had tried to tune the boorish geezer out. Nevertheless, she suspected that Taccati was purposely avoiding matters of substance, holding Gil at arms length with spinsterish intimacies that really divulged nothing but his social awkwardness and his lack of face-to-face warmth.

Suddenly an angry-looking black man on the other side of the dining room rudely hailed Gil. Was that possible? Bev wondered. No one at their table had done anything to offend the man. Maybe his shout had actually been directed at someone behind them. Bev glanced hastily back, but beyond the lattice-topped divider was nothing but a narrow walkway to one of the building's exits. This walkway was empty.

"Hey, Slim Jim!" the black reiterated. "Yeah, *you.* Talkin' to you, Slim Jim. Cain' you hear?"

"What?" Gil managed.

"'What?' What?' he say. Lemme borroh you pen, thah's what? I need to borroh you pen, Slim Jim."

Taccati, who had continued to blather through the importunate Negro's first remark, finally shut up. Pointedly, he did not turn around. Bev's breakfast made a small but perceptible lurch in her stomach. The black man appeared to have allies. Two or three tough-looking teenagers sat to his immediate right, their expressions unhelpfully neutral. Bev could not tell if the angry man's rude tactics tickled or embarrassed them.

Their leader — if he *was* their leader — had a flabby-looking body but the face of a smutty bull terrier. His clothes, a torn plaid shirt hanging loose over grease-stained khaki trousers, were plainly less expensive than those of the long-limbed toughs nearby. Bev also saw that, his demand for a pen aside, he had no scrap of paper or cardboard on which to write.

"He wants to borrow your pen," Taccati whispered.

"How 'bao' it, Slim Jim? Gimme it here."

"No!" Gil blurted.

"'No'? Whachu mean, 'No'? I'm gonna give it back, ain' I? Who you thin' you are, anyway?"

"I'm not anybody," Gil said, clearly struggling to stay calm. "And I'd've

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loaned you my pen if you'd had the courtesy to ask me decently."

"What the shih."

"My name isn't Slim Jim, and I was talking to Mr. Taccati here when you interrupted us."

The black man began to mumble curses, looking away from their table and also from his teenage allies — as if no one on the premises could comprehend the size of this latest affront to his righteousness. Several people in the dining room looked warily back and forth, between Gil and his unintelligibly lisping enemy. They probably feared the outbreak of a brawl. So did Bev. Taccati, meanwhile, opened his pink satin jacket and reached for the ballpoint pen clipped to his shirt pocket.

"Don't you dare," Bev warned him.

Taccati let go of the edge of his jacket.

Bev now imagined all four blacks approaching Gil to extort her pen from him. Instead the teenagers abandoned their tables and filed down the far corridor to the exit opposite the Read House. Either the prize wasn't worth the aggravation, or they had never been the plaid-shirted man's comrades at all. Maybe, in fact, their departure was meant to signal their unamimous rejection of his behavior. Bev was unsure of their motives but grateful to them for withdrawing. Gil, she could tell, was no less relieved.

Still muttering obscenities, the would-be pen-borrower got up and began wandering from booth to booth. In one of the register lines, he buttonholed another black man and pointed at their table. The second man shook his head, took his coffee cup, and sat down at a booth well removed from theirs. Was the troublemaker emotionally disturbed? Was he on drugs? For a long time, impossible to ignore, he patrolled the edge of the main dining room.

"I admire your courage," Taccati told Gil. "But it isn't much to loan a man a pen."

"He'd've never gotten it back," Bev said indignantly.

"So what? How much could it have cost?"

"Money isn't the issue," Bev said, not bothering to hide the fact that she was disgusted with Gil's appeasement-minded hero.

"Well, let's not argue," he said. "Bad for the digestion."

Breakfast more or less ended on that note.

Paranoid about the morning's events, Gil snooped around outside McDonald's before allowing Bev to step onto the sidewalk. But his enemy had already left by another exit, and no one else was lying in wait on the boulevard to ambush them. A moment later, in the hotel's foyer, Nathan Taccati took his leave of the couple, wishing them a good day and a safe trip home on Sunday.

"Thus I kiss off my dear friend Gil Vannoy," Bev said. She aimed a sweep-

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ing Dinah Shore farewell at the door of the elevator behind which the writer had just disappeared.

"Cut it out, Bev. He's not so bad."

"Why? Because he said he admired your courage?"

Gil shook his head exasperatedly, but she could tell that her assessment of the situation was right on target. For Gil, Taccati's offhand praise had made up for a lot, including his self-engrossed blather. It almost redeemed their disturbing confrontation with the angry black man. Almost. Bev could not help wondering if the troublemaker would now try to find someone else on whom to take out his frustrations. This thought niggled like an ill-set hook.

Later that day they went browsing through the huckster room amid dozens of long, low tables hopefully overburdened with merchandise. Books, slipcased comics, movie-poster albums, board games, boxes of handmade pewter jewelry and funny tin lapel buttons. Taccati had just failed to show for another scheduled panel, and many of the conventioneers had gravitated to the huckster room simply to pass the time until the evening's banquet and the obligatory Guest of Honor speech.

At the banquet, Bev reflected, Nathan Taccati would be in his glory. In front of large audiences, he was a very accomplished speaker and something of a showman.

"Pardon me," a familiar masculine voice said, bringing her back to the moment.

Bev turned. The expatriate Nigerian who had played "Albumblatt" for her was standing beside her with a small package wrapped in brown paper. The package nudged its way into Bev's hands.

"What's this?"

"For your friend," Azoba Obiesie said. "From Nathan."

Gil was three or four tables away, examining pewter statuettes of unicorns and dragons.

"Why doesn't Nathan give it to my friend himself?"

"He's ill. A stomach problem. But he asked me to give this to you, to give to your friend, with his most sincere compliments."

"Does that mean he's going to miss the banquet, too?"

"No help for it, I'm afraid. He asked me to take his place. I agreed. I can promise you only a trifling sort of talk, followed by a brief performance of rather nifty card tricks."

"I'd rather hear you play the piano."

"Wrong venue, kind lady. Undoubtedly the wrong venue." Obiesie regaled her with his gaunt smile, bowed, and disappeared into the crowd of customers clogging Bev's aisle.

She worked her way down this same aisle to Gil and gave him the package from Taccati. His initial

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puzzled expression turned into a grin of anticipation and delight. He led Bev out of the huckster room to an ornate couch on the mezzanine overlooking the inner court. Here they sat down together to open the package. Gil tore the paper away, revealing a dilapidated paperback book.

"*That's* lovely," Bev said.

"It *is* lovely," Gil replied. "It's a first edition of the only novel ever to win Taccati the Hugo Award. Almost any of the book dealers in there would give me twenty or thirty dollars for it. Some of his fans would lay down even more than that, a hundred or a hundred and fifty maybe. It's *rare*."

"Well, I hope he autographed it for you."

"I'm sure he did. Look, there's even a note attached to the inside of the back cover."

Bev took the book from Gil and unclipped the handwritten note. "Shall I read it to you?"

"Be my guest."

"'Dear Slim Jim,'" Bev began, shaking out the note so that she could see it more clearly. "'I've been thinking a lot about what happened this morning in McDonald's. Upon reflection, it seems to me that the whole incident was avoidable. When called out as Slim Jim, you might have better responded, 'Hey, Slack Jack, dinna yo' mamma teach you no manners?' In a friendly, bantering way, of course. You see, Slack Jack approached you too black, which pissed you off, and you replied too white, which pissed him off.'"

Gil's jaw had visibly begun to jut.

"There's more," Bev told him. "Do you want to hear it?" When he made no reply, she continued reading Taccati's note aloud to the end: "'Misunderstandings of this kind trouble me so deeply because they're precisely the thing that keep the different racial, religious, and political factions of our species at loggerheads. And Gil, it's people who think and perceive as we do who have the *major* responsibility to build the bridges of understanding that others lack the background, the fellow feeling, or the will to engineer. I hope you'll think a little more about the way you handled that man's simple request. In the meantime, here's an early copy of *Androk* for your library. It pleases me to think of it sitting on the shelf of someone as bright and discerning as you.' It's signed, Gil. The signature is 'Overweight Nate.'"

A cute signature for a transparent little scolding, Bev thought. As for the book, it was nothing but a spoonful of sugar to make the medicine of Taccati's rebuke go down.

Gil did not move. With brown paper spread across his lap like an apron, he sat stone-still. Taccati had apparently shorn him of the one memory of their breakfast meeting that Gil had wanted to preserve.

"Damn the superior old fart," he said. He removed the copy of *Androk*

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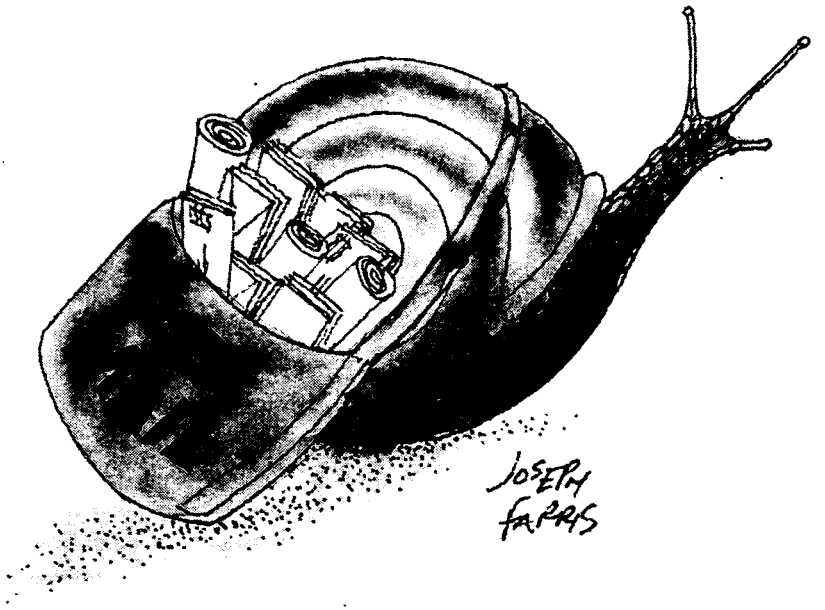
from Bev's hands and deliberately stripped the paperback novel of its cover. He ripped each of the pages away from the glued binding. He put the mutilated remains of the gift on the couch, stood up, and, squinting down at the baby grand in the portico, told Bev that he was ready to go home.

"Of course you are," she said. "I was ready to go home two minutes after we got here."

But she, too, looked at the elegant old piano downstairs, and the sight of it made her remember that her trip to Chattanooga with Gil had not been an unmitigated disaster. This evening, going home, they would completely redeem it. After sunset was the best time to embark on a long summer drive. On the balmy ride home in Gil's beat-up station wagon, she would lean back in her seat and think about that enigmatic Nigerian playing Beethoven.

Sometimes you lost, sometimes you won, and sometimes you drew even. On this occasion, Bev thought, maybe she and Gil had come out a little ahead.



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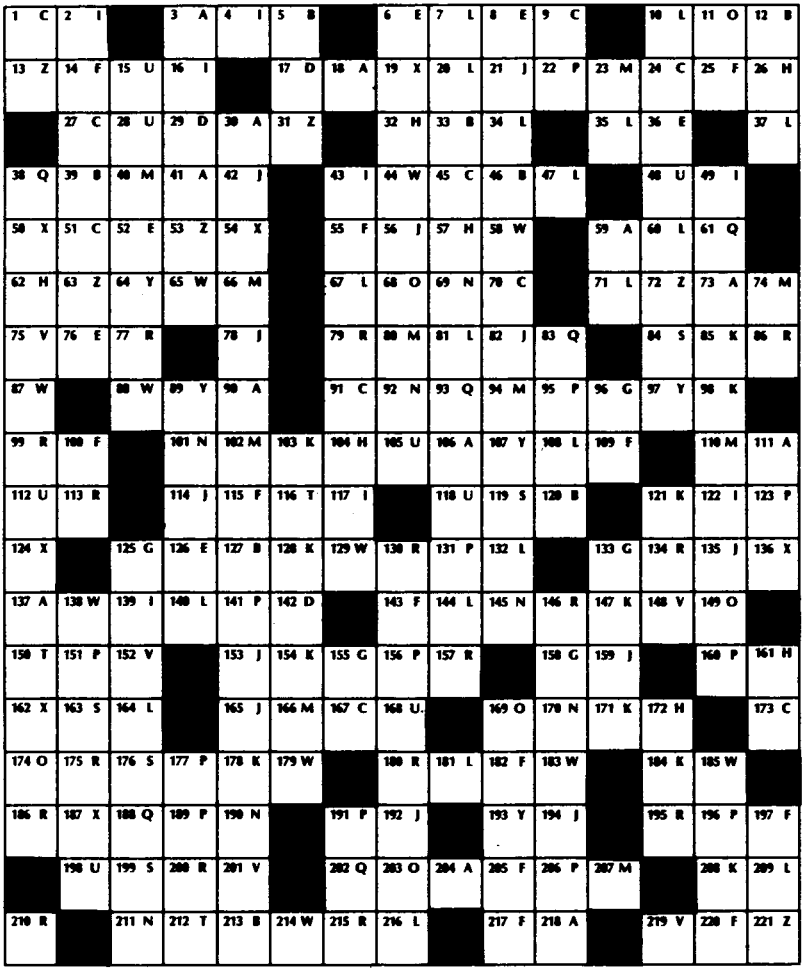

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Acrostic Puzzle

by Georgia Fillingame Adams

This puzzle contains a quotation from a work in science fiction. First, guess as many of the clues as you can and write the word or words in the numbered blanks opposite the clues. Put these letters in the matching blocks in the puzzle. (The end of a line in the diagram doesn't mean the end of a word.) If your words are correct, you will see words forming in the puzzle blocks. Fill in the missing letters and put them in the numbered spaces opposite the clues. That will help you guess those words and therefore get more of the puzzle, and so on. You don't need to be familiar with the quotation in order to work the puzzle. The first letters of the correctly answered clues will spell out the name of the author and the title of the work from which the quotation is taken.

A. Anthology edited by Pournelle and Carr

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
106 204 73 18 30 59 111 90 218 3

___ ___
41 137

B. Author of *The Sword of Winter* (last name, first init.)

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
46 33 39 50 12 5 127 213

C. Theme of John Varley's *Millennium*

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
27 1 91 24 9 51 45 167 70 173

D. "___, Ma-Where's Willie?"

___ ___ ___
17 29 142

E. ___ *Hunters* by Somtow Sucharitkul

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
76 6 36 126 52 8

F. Latest in Baley and Olivaw series

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
25 14 55 205 143 109 217 100 197 220

___ ___
182 115

G. *Welcome,* ___ by Wilhelm

___ ___ ___ ___ ___
133 158 155 96 125

H. She wrote "A Letter from the Clearys" for one of her awards (first name, last init.)

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
57 104 62 172 161 26 32

I. The first of a trilogy about the Elder Isles

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
4 16 49 2 122 43 139 117

J. ___ ___ ___ *of Stars,* a collection by Clarke

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
56 82 135 114 192 153 194 165 159 21

___ ___
42 78

K. "___ *of* ___" by Robert E. Howard

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
147 128 154 208 103 85 121 184 178 171

___
98

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L. A ___ *of* ___ *and* ___ by Poul Anderson

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
47 35 20 67 60 164 216 209 181 140

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
108 10 34 7 81 132 144 71 37

M. Short 1951 novel, included in J

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
207 166 80 66 23 94 102 40 74 110

N. The Towhee of Eastern U.S.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
211 190 170 145 92 69 101

O. "Tarcan of the ___" by Knight

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
11 68 169 174 203 149

P. Novel by author of Y, about Duncan Makenzie

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
95 160 22 131 156 177 191 141 123 196

___ ___ ___
206 189 151

Q. A Grand Master of SF

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
93 61 38 202 83 188

R. ___ *of* ___ ___ Novelette by author of puzzle quotation

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
180 186 134 79 195 77 130 210 157 200

___ ___ ___ ___ ___
215 146 113 99 86

S. *Lady* ___ Sometimes she's a lady

___ ___ ___ ___ ___
163 119 84 176 199

T. *The* ___*Country* by Ray Bradbury

___ ___ ___
212 116 150

U. ___ ___ a tangled ___ we weave

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
175 28 15 118 112 48 105 168 198

V. ___ *in the Skull*

___ ___ ___ ___ ___
148 152 219 75 201

W. a.k.a. Richard Bachman

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
129 88 138 44 65 87 183 58 214 185

___
179

X. The moment of truth for *The Chessmen of Mars*

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
136 124 120 162 187 19 54

Y. *Against the Fall* of ___

___ ___ ___ ___ ___
97 193 64 89 107

Z. *The* ___ *Invasion* by Philip K. Dick

___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
13 63 53 72 221 31

Answer will appear in next month's issue.

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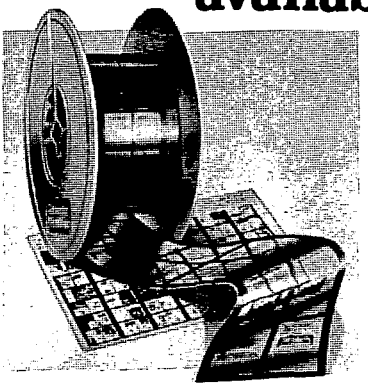

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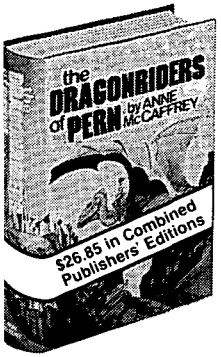

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